The Boogeyman

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The Boogeyman

by Call_Me_Clarence

Summary

Will and Hannibal head to Minnesota to solve the case of The Boogeyman, a serial killer who hides under victims' beds and waits for them to fall asleep before attacking. There's only one hotel room available, and even worse, only the one bed. As they get closer to the killer they find themselves getting closer to each other.

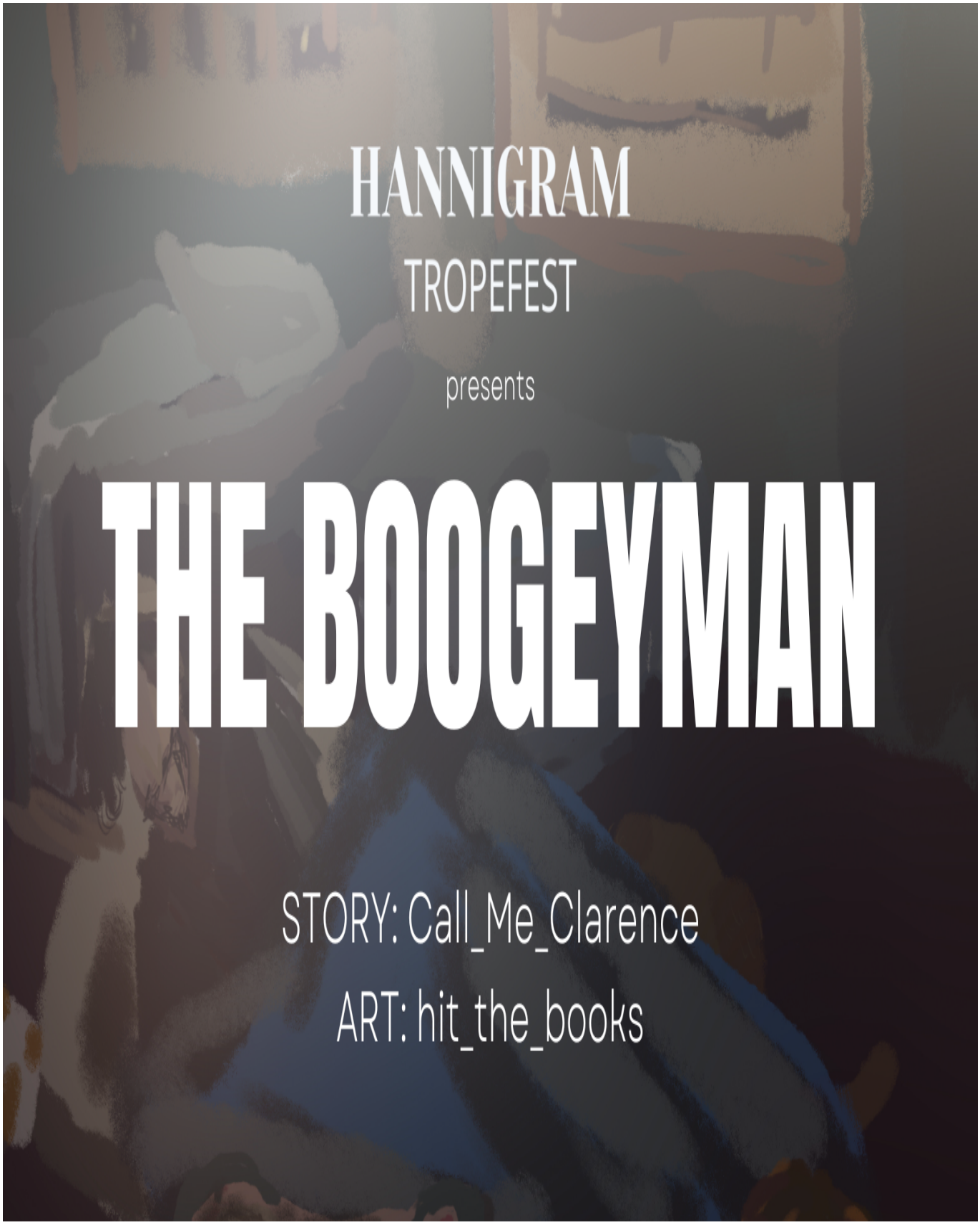
Notes

For the Hannigram Trope fest 2022

I would like to thank my amazing Beta hopefully_devoted_to_fugue.

Lovely artwork for the fic by hit_the_books can be found here! and here!

Chapter 1


HANNIGRAM
TROPEFEST
presents
THE BOOGEYMAN
STORY: Call_Me_Clarence
ART: hit_the_books

Lanesboro, Minnesota

Thursday, 11:40 pm

Hannibal and Will had been on the road for hours, heading to a case in Minnesota. They were chasing after an unsub atrociously named *The Boogeyman* by local media due to his tendency of hiding under victims' beds before murdering them. They were meant to take a flight in, but a snowstorm put an end to that idea.

It was late, Will was tired and grumpy, and he'd been looking forward to slipping into a warm bed and passing out for a few hours before they headed to the crime scene in the morning. If only he'd known.

"*What do you mean there's only one room*?"

Will had called ahead when they were still on the road, just to make sure something like this wouldn't happen. He knew, a part of him *knew* , that this was going to happen. It always did with this chain of hotels. They'd sell your room out even if you'd booked ahead of time. Apparently, quick money in the moment meant more than customer loyalty.

"I'm sorry, but there is a convention in town. Some sort of science thing--"

"Listen," Will puts his gloved hands on the front desk, "I don't care about some convention. I care about the two rooms, the ones I was assured over the phone were available. Rooms to which you should be handing me the keys for right now."

"I'm... sorry?" The front desk woman has a striking resemblance to Alana, so Will sort of has a soft spot for her. Even if she had just screwed him over.

Will sighs, draws his hands back, "Alright," he relents, "You can't give me what doesn't exist. But there is the one room, correct?"

"Yes, sir, and we will be happy to knock off some of the price due to the inconvenience and... " She's typing on her computer when she freezes, "Oh dear."

Will closes his eyes, "What now?"

She looks up at him with the most apologetic face he's ever seen on a customer service worker.

—

Will heads back to the car, cold wind and snow doing their best to knock him over. He yanks the passenger side door open and shuts it just as violently once he's inside. He seethes for a moment, while Hannibal watches with concern.

"I take it things have not gone according to plan?"

"Not exactly," Will hands Hannibal the room key, and then points across the parking lot, "We're over there."

Hannibal looks down at his key, and then at Will, who is obviously keyless.

"They only had the one room," Will explains.

"And that is what has riled you up so?" Hannibal smirks, putting the car into drive and heading across the parking lot. "This will not be the first time I've had to share a room with someone--"

"There's only one bed."

"... Ah," Hannibal puts the car in park, swallows. "I will take the couch."

"There is no couch."

"The floor then--"

"Hannibal, you're not sleeping on the floor." Will glances over at Hannibal and sees a peculiar look on his face, "I mean, I'll sleep on the floor. You don't have to."

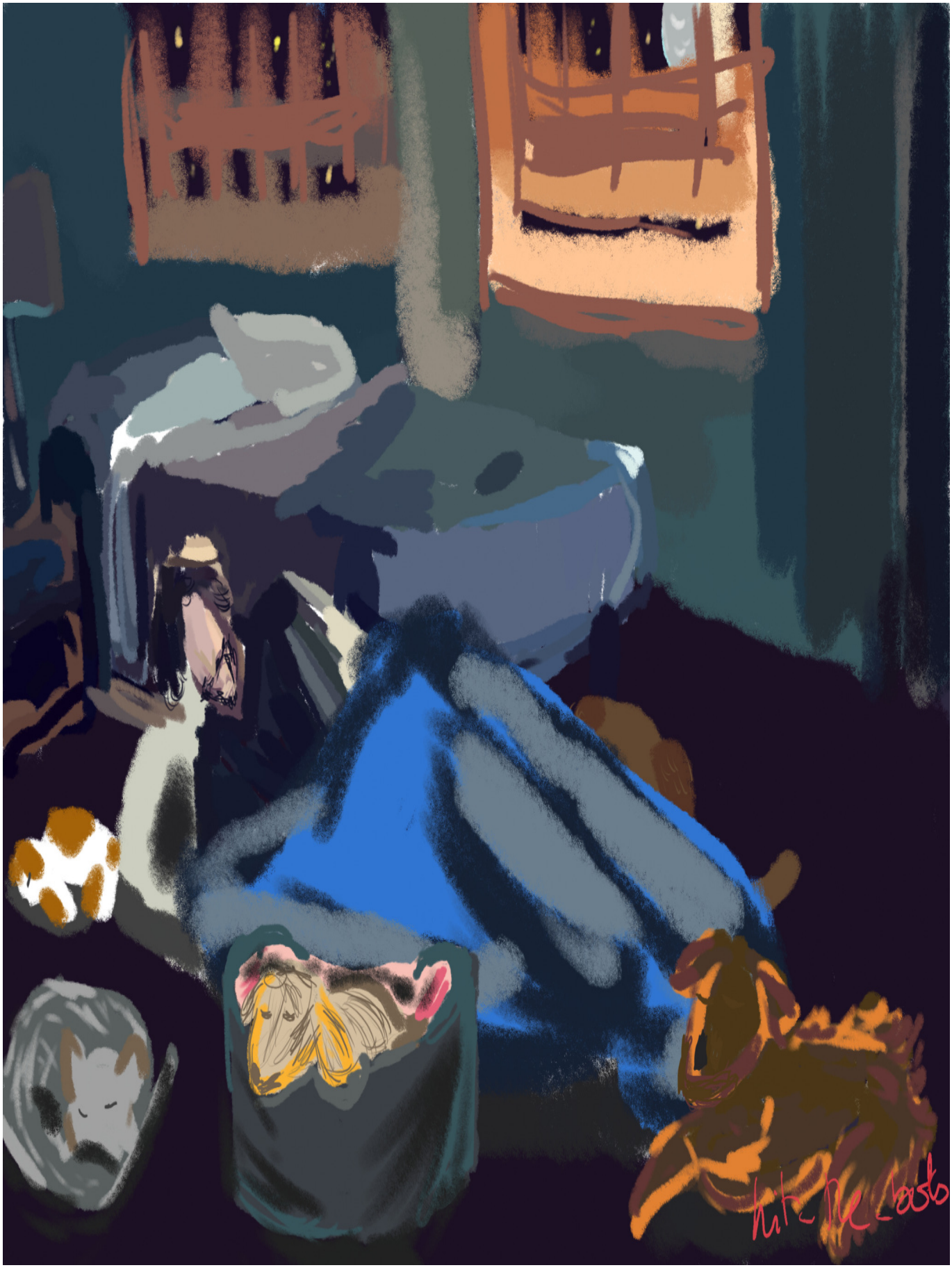
"Nonsense--"

"I do it all the time already."

"...Why do you sleep on the floor, Will?"

"Well, I..." Will considers telling a fib about having a bad back and the hardness of the floor helping to soothe his muscles but decides on just telling the truth. Why the hell not?

"Because I don't like getting dog hair in my bed, but I do like snuggling with my dogs. Sometimes I fall asleep on the floor."



Hannibal smiles at him and then opens his mouth, probably about to say something involving some fancy version of the word 'cute'.

"*Don't* say it," Will warns before getting out of the car.

They quickly get their bags and Hannibal lets them inside. Will has to fight with the door a bit to get it to shut, but eventually, he wins the battle with the storm and it slams maybe a bit too loudly for the time of night. Will looks over at the clock radio and sees it's nearly midnight. They'd been driving for eight hours straight since their last stop then. Fucking fantastic.

Will starts to shrug out of his coat when he realizes the temperature in the room isn't much warmer than in the snowstorm outside.

"What the hell..." He goes over to the thermostat and sees it's stuck at 20 degrees even though it's switched to 'heat'. Will switches it to off, then back to heat, then to cool, then aggressively taps it a few times, as if that'd make a difference.

"Is it broken?" Hannibal asks, having finished putting his clothes away in the drawers under the TV, clothing too fancy to leave in a bag and get wrinkled.

"What do you think?" Will grumbles. Then, because he feels like an asshole, he adds, "Sorry. Yeah, I think it's busted."

Hannibal sits on the edge of the bed and grabs the phone, dialing for the front desk.

"Yes, hello, there appears to be a problem with our thermostat. Room 202. Yes. It's not working. Yes," Hannibal closes his eyes and sighs through his nose, "I understand. Thank you for your time."

Hannibal hangs up the phone and looks over at Will, "There appears to be a problem with several of the hotel room's heating systems. A repairman is coming in the morning."

"What are we supposed to do until then? Freeze to death?"

"Regardless, you will no longer be sleeping on the floor."

Will had to agree, it was far too cold for that.

"Sleeping with my therapist. What would Freddie Lounds have to say about that?" Will jokes.

"Nothing respectful, I'm certain," Hannibal smirks.

"I'm going to get changed."

"Put on something warm."

They both wear sweaters to bed.

But it’s not enough.

Will shivers on his side of the bed.

"Perhaps," Hannibal begins to suggest, "We should huddle up for warmth."

"You *can't* be serious."

"Deadly so, I'm afraid."

Another bout of shivers racks Will's body before he relents, "Alright."

And suddenly Hannibal is shuffling up against Will's back, his hand finding its way around Will's middle.

Will grunts at the sudden contact.

"Are you alright?" Hannibal asks.

"... Yeah," Will admits.

After a few minutes, Will adds, "This is weird."

"Is it?"

"Unfortunately."

"I can move back---"

"No no no," Will grabs onto Hannibal's arm to stop his retreat, "It's... warm."

"Good."

"Hmm," Will hums noncommittally

He doesn't remember falling asleep.

—

Will wakes with a gasp.

Something's not right.

He can't put his finger on it at first…

... But then he realizes someone has their arm around him.

Will freezes, breaths quickening.

Who...?

"*See* ...."

Will's breath stops in his throat as the word is whispered into his ear.

"*Seee* ..." the voice repeats.

Will doesn't have to turn around to know who it is, but he startles all the same, pulling up and away from—

Garret Jacob Hobbs.

Will tries to scream, but can't.

Hobbs grabs the front of Will's shirt, pulls him in close, " *SEE* !" He shrieks and then—

Kisses him.

"*Will*."

Will wakes for the second time, finally finding himself in reality.

Hannibal is facing him, they are very close and tangled up in each other. Will can't see his face in the dark but can feel his concern.

"I--" Will starts, but the words get stuck.

"You had a nightmare," Hannibal finishes for him.

"Yeah," Will breathes, shaking. It's then that he realizes how sweaty he is.

Shit.

"I'm sorry," Will detangles himself from where he's wrapped around Hannibal. The man must be coated in his sweat as well.

"No need to apologize," Hannibal says, sitting up in the bed, "Do you mind if I turn on the light?"

"Yes. I mean no."

Hannibal hesitates,

"Go ahead," Will sighs, sitting up as well.

Hannibal's bedside lamp turns on and it blinds Will for a moment.

He recovers and looks down at himself, there's no dark spot of sweat to be seen, but he touches his sweater and feels how damp it is, and can feel how his shirt is soaked beneath. He guesses that Hannibal must be in the same state.

"I'm... so sorry. Sometimes I get night sweats. I should've warned you."

"It's quite alright," Hannibal says, completely unperturbed.

"It's really not--"

"Will," Hannibal places a hand on Will's shoulder, "It's fine."

Will's shaking increases. Being coated in sweat in a freezing room isn't exactly conducive to warmth.

"Are you alright?" Hannibal asks in concern.

"Cold," Will's hands come up and cross over to rub his own arms.

"We should get changed," Hannibal suggests

"Yeah," Will throws the covers back and is met with a wall of cold. He lets out a rush of breath before quickly making his way across the room to his bag. He grabs a shirt and heads to the bathroom, all before Hannibal has made it out of bed.

Will shuts the door behind him and leans against it, letting the humiliation wash over him. He'd just gotten his own sweat all over his *therapist*.

"*Oh god*," Will runs his hands down his damp face.

But he is really, *really*, cold, so he bites his lip, takes off his sweater and shirt, body being slapped by the freezing temperature, and uses the shirt to wipe off the sweat from his body before tossing it and the sweater in a heap on the floor. He quickly changes into his new dry shirt and then hesitates with his hand on the doorknob.

"Will?" A voice comes from the other side of the door, "Are you alright?"

"Yeah," Will calls out, sighing before grabbing a towel hanging on a rack and opening the door.

Hannibal is standing there, a worried look on his face. He then eyes the towel, eyebrows raising in question.

"Just in case," Will gives a half-measured laugh.

Will lays the towel down on the bed beneath the covers and lays on top of it. When Hannibal scoots up behind him, Will speaks up, "I don't think we should 'huddle' anymore."

"I don't mind," Hannibal says.

"I do," Will snaps back, then relents with, "I wouldn't want you to have to change again on my account."

"Alright..."

And that was the end of that.

Will shivers the whole night through.

—

The following morning was cold and unkind to Will's aching, shivering body.

But they had a crime scene to get to, so what was Will to do but obey the call of the FBI?

403 Lexington Ave

Lanesboro, Minnesota

Friday, 7:20 am

The sun is just peeking out over the horizon when they arrive at the Knox house. It’s surrounded by cop cars and crime scene personnel milling about, taking photos, and keeping onlookers off the property.

It's a large two-story house, perfect in every way. Almost like a prop house for real estate sales. The inside reinforces this idea. The place doesn't look lived in.

Hannibal heads upstairs right away, but Will spots a familiar face in the living room.

"Will," Katz acknowledges, coming up to him, camera in hand.

"Bev," He nods, "This place look staged to you?"

"You should check out the bathrooms," She smirks, "I didn't think people actually lived like this."

"Not a single personal item to be seen. Every room putting up a public front. Any idea what the Knox's did for a living?"

"Whatever it was, they made bank. See that couch over there? Five thousand dollars," Katz raises her brows, then rolls her eyes at the look on Will's face, "I was in the market for a couch recently and looking way out of my price range. For fun."

"Uh-huh," Will smirks.

Katz punches him lightly on the arm, "So, how was your trip? You didn't text me when you got in."

"Too tired. And cold. Our room doesn't have heating at the moment."

"'*Our* room' as in you two are sharing?"

"Long story."

Katz opens her mouth but Will cuts her off,

"Which I'm not willing to get into right now."

Katz rolls her eyes again, "Fine, but you owe me. Drinks tonight? There's a pub in town that looks pretty decent"

"As long as it's just us, I'm down."

"Had a rough night?"

"Like you wouldn't believe."

Someone clears their throat behind Will. Will gives Katz an apologetic smile that says he'll see her later.

"If you're done socializing," Jack says, "We've got a crime scene upstairs waiting for you, Will."

Will waves goodbye to Katz who gives him a thumbs up in return, and then follows Jack upstairs.

To say the scene was soup would be putting it mildly.

The bodies had been removed yesterday, but the bloodshed left behind told a gruesome story.

Jack fills them in on the details.

"The unsub waited under the bed until the victims fell asleep. Rebecca and Robert Knox, victims six and seven. Based on the wounds, they were stabbed over 42 times each in the neck until the heads were severed. Once our unsub was done with Richard, they moved on to Rebecca, who had defensive wounds on one hand as if she'd fought back. The heads were removed from the scene, we still haven't found them."

"Removing the heads is important to him," Will says, "But there are easier ways to remove a head than stabbing."

"Perhaps the method is just as important." Hannibal supplies.

"It's frenzied, unhinged. It feels passionate, heat of the moment, but he plans these killings ahead of time. Possibly for days, weeks."

Will looks at the two bloodied spots on the bed. "They wait as a predatory animal might. Whoever's doing this is not thinking like a human. He's lost his humanity. Or at least feels as if he has. He's been degraded in some way. Made to feel lesser than. He's given in to the beast within."

"That would explain the small area of kills. They stay within their own territory." Jack says.

Will pulls a bottle of aspirin out of his pocket, pops a couple in his mouth.

"Are you ready?" Jack asks.

With a rough swallow Will downs the pills, they stick in his dry throat so he swallows again. "Yeah," he says, though he feels anything but.

"We'll be right outside," Jack assures before he ushers everyone out of the room and it's just Will and the scene.

Will takes a deep breath before getting on his knees. He maneuvers under the bed. Once he's laid flat on his back, staring up at the underside of the bed, he closes his eyes.

The pendulum of his mind swings in a bright orange light.

FWUM. ***FWUM***. ***FWUM***.

He opens his eyes.

The light has changed, it is now night.

The bed creaks above him as someone changes positions in their sleep.

He takes a deep breath, letting the anticipation of what he's about to do wash over him.

It's time.

Will moves out from under the bed. He stands before his prey, staring down at them. They don't know he's there. They won't know until it's too late...

Will grips the knife in his hand tight, before–

He slashes the woman's throat first.

She wakes with a wet gurgle, hands flying up to her neck.

Her husband grunts in his sleep without waking.

Will crawls over the woman to straddle the man. He blinks awake now, confused. He sees Will and opens his mouth to let out a scream, but the muscles in Will's arm move faster than the man's vocal cords.

He brings the blade down in a quick movement to stab into the man's throat before no more than a breathy gasp can be uttered.

Over and over he brings the blade down.

Blood spurts up, hitting Will in the face. It feels good, warm.

Will keeps stabbing, the blood coating the blade and his hand, splattering up on his arm and chest, the walls and ceiling getting their own splash of crimson.

Eventually, Will is stabbing nothing but the bed below, the man's head completely severed.

Will turns to the woman, who's fallen off the bed and is crawling towards the door, one hand around her throat to stop the flow of red.

Will gets off the bed and stalks over towards her, grabbing her by the hair and pulling her back towards the man. He lifts her up with ease, throwing her onto the bed.

She tries to fight him one-handed. Will begins stabbing regardless, knowing a hand is nothing to a sharp knife. He stabs her over and over, her protective hand doing little to stop the blows from impaling her already slashed throat.

When her head is severed, he grabs it, and the man's, putting them into a bag.

He doesn't clean himself up, simply grabs the bag and exits the room.

***But wait** ...*

There's someone else here.

He pauses at the door. He can sense them.

He drops the bag by the edge of the bed and gets down on his hands and knees.

He looks under the bed and sees him.

It's ***Will*** *.*

He reaches out an arm, grabbing him, trying to drag him out from under the bed–

Will comes back to himself, screaming.

Someone has a hold of him, trying to drag him out from under the bed, he fights them until he realizes they're saying something.

"Will! Will! It's me!"

Jack Crawford.

Jack stops trying to grab him and Will stops screaming.

Will lays under the bed for a moment, panting, before he shakily makes his way out.

Jack, Hannibal, and a few crime scene techs are watching him with wary eyes.

"You were screaming," Jack says, kneeling next to him. He stands and Hannibal comes forward, offering a hand up. Will takes it and Hannibal helps him to his feet, putting a steadying hand on his arm as Will sways on shaky legs.

"Are you alright?" Hannibal asks quietly.

Will nods jerkily.

Jack turns and sees the crime techs, "OUT!" he shouts, and they scramble for the door.

Will reacts to the raised voice as if he'd just been slapped by it.

"What did you see?" Jack asks, lowering his voice into something that sounds kind, concerned.

Will swallows, he feels sweat beading and slipping down his face. "I saw..." Part of the scene had obviously just been his imagination, there was no fourth person. The fourth person was Will, intruding in on a primal moment via his replay. "Rebecca was alive after the first attack. She tried to make it to the door," he points at a blood stain on the floor to prove his point, "He pulled her back to the bed." Will tries to clear the lump from his throat, "He takes the heads as trophies."

"Do you have a profile?"

"Male. Older. Strong... very strong. Anti-social. He'll have a car. He feels like... his territory has been encroached on... these are revenge killings." Will shakes his head, "What---what did Rebbeca and Robert do for a living?"

"Real estate agents. Both of them."

Will nods, "They'll have visited his property, recently."

"I must insist Will be allowed to rest now," Hannibal says, already leading Will towards the door.

"Alright. I'll check in with you both later." Jack nods, letting them pass.

Will sits in the car, calling hotel after hotel while he waits for Hannibal to come back from the local grocery store. The man had absolutely refused to let them just pick up fast food for breakfast but Will wasn't complaining. His stomach still hadn't settled from the violent replay.

"I'm sorry, sir, but we don't have any rooms available."

Will sighs, "Do you know when any rooms might open up?"

"There's a rather large convention in town for the weekend. But perhaps Monday something might be available?"

It’s Friday.

Will rubs his eyes under his glasses, "Thank you, I'll call back then."

"Thank you, sir. Goodbye."

Will hangs up the phone. That was the last hotel in a thirty-mile radius.

The backseat door on the driver's side opens and Will startles a bit, before realizing it's Hannibal with their groceries.

Hannibal closes the door and then gets in on the driver's side. He looks over at Will and takes in his grumpy demeanor.

"No luck?"

"None," Will sighs, adjusting his glasses. "Everyone's all booked up with this convention."

"Well, then... we will just have to make due."

"Yeah," Will forces a half-smile.

Hannibal pauses for a moment, and then, "I think some breakfast might lighten your mood."

Will eyes the groceries in the backseat, "What all did you get?"

Hannibal smiles, "That would ruin the surprise."

Will rolls his eyes with a smile, "Right."

When they get back to the hotel Hannibal puts some of the groceries away in their mini-fridge, the rest he lays out on the table, along with a hot plate and a pan he seemingly magicked out of thin air.

"Did you pack those?"

"Of course."

"Of course," Will chuckles, and then a shiver racks through him, even though he's still in his coat.

Hannibal notices.

"They should be sending someone by shortly, to fix the heating."

"Sure they will," Will grumbles, slipping his shoes off and then sitting back on the bed with the tv remote, flipping through channels. He settles on a fishing competition and lets it lull him into a stupor until the smell of cooking meat draws him out of it again.

"That smells delicious," he says, perking up a little, stomach feeling possibly up to a meal.

"Thank you," Hannibal smiles, "It's almost ready," he assures at the hungry look in Will's eyes.

Something in the way Hannibal is looking at him reminds Will of his dream last night. Will turns his gaze back to the TV.

There are things one should tell a therapist. That you kissed a serial killer of young women in a dream is *not* one of them. What does that even say about Will? He shivers, but can luckily pass it off as due to the cold. And it's not as if he enjoyed it, the kiss. On the contrary, just thinking about it makes him want to puke, despite the mouth-watering aromas coming from Hannibal's motel cooking. He chalks it up to his brain trying to torture him and tries to focus back on the TV, to see who won the fishing competition.

"Breakfast is served," Hannibal says and Will tries to get his mind into an eating mode.

He looks over at the table and sees most of the ingredients have been cleared away, only the skillet on the hotplate is left. Will watches as Hannibal sets two plates on either side and then looks at Will expectantly.

Will gets up and heads to his seat. There's some sort of yellow omelet-like thing in the skillet. Hannibal cuts out a slice and places it on Will's plate.

"Bauernfruhstuck," Hannibal says, "A German omelet, with ham, potatoes, and cheese."

Will takes a tentative bite, not because he doesn't think it will be amazing, but because he's afraid his stomach will revolt regardless of how it tastes. The moment the omelet touches his tongue his mouth explodes almost painfully with flavor and saliva.

"Mmm," Will hums, chewing through the pain until he gets to pure pleasure, "It's delicious, thank you."

"Your welcome," Hannibal smiles, "I figured you needed something hardy to settle your stomach after this morning."

"You're not wrong," Will says around a bite, he swallows, "Today's scene was..." he doesn't want to say 'rough', "... rough," he says anyway, a better word eluding him at the moment.

"I was quite concerned. May I ask what caused you to scream? Has that happened before?"

"I've never screamed at a scene before, no," Will forces a chuckle, "I saw..." he swallows, "The Boogeyman came after me. After he was done with his other victims."

"Have you ever been attacked in one of your replays before?"

"Never," Will takes another bite of food, forces himself to swallow it.

"Do you see yourself as one of his victims?"

"I was intruding on his tableau. He didn't like it." Will sets his fork down.

Hannibal notices, because of course he does. "Stomach unsettled?"

Will looks down at his half-finished meal, "I'm sorry. Just not much up to eating at the moment."

"That is perfectly fine. You can make it up at lunch."

"I don't really eat the prescribed three meals a day..."

"That will change. As long as you're rooming with me."

"Forcing me to keep healthy, Doctor?"

"It is my duty, both as a psychiatrist and ex-medical practitioner."

"Alright," Will chuckles, runs a hand across his mouth, and levels Hannibal with a look, "We'll see."

"So we shall."

Chapter 2

Old Mill Pub

Lanesboro, Minnesota

Friday, 11:13 pm

"You slept with your therapist?!" Bev laughs loudly at Will, causing several people to look their way.

They're in the Old Mill Pub, a quaint little hole in the wall. It was a few blocks away from Will's hotel and he'd walked. Drinking shots and beers, they were on beer two and shot three.

"You should be a little louder, I think a few people in the back didn't hear you."

"Sorry," Bev puts a hand over her mouth, lowers it, "Okay, I'm calm. I'm calm about you sleeping with *Dr. Lecter* . I literally can't even imagine him sleeping, let alone with *you* ."

"Thanks."

"You know what I mean," she waves a hand. "So... how was it?"

"Sweaty," Will grimaces.

"Oh no, your night sweats again? Was it bad?"

"I'd categorize it as 'traumatic' and 'catastrophic'."

"I'm *so* sorry," And she seems like she really means it. "Man, you've got to get that checked out. Night sweats, headaches. It's not normal."

"Yeah, maybe when I get back... I don't know, it doesn't really seem that serious."

"It could be. My sister had headaches for over a year before she went in to see a doctor. Turns out she had a brain tumor."

"God. Is she okay?"

"Yeah. I mean not really. It was benign, but she still has the headaches."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. Just get to a doctor. Hell, you're rooming with one. Ask Hannibal. He'll probably tell you the same thing I am."

"Maybe," Will says, downing his fourth shot.

"So stubborn," Katz says before downing her own shot as well.

"So, how's your hotel room?" Will asks, "Please spare no detail. I want to live vicariously."

"Well, it's warm, and I'm the only one in it."

"Heaven," Will sighs.

"Hey, you're the one getting gourmet home-cooked meals. I'm the one eating pub food and McDonald's to survive."

"The food is a nice plus. But I'd rather not have to spoon my therapist for warmth."

Bev laughs into her beer, spilling it down her chin.

"You're drunk," Will chastises.

"Just you wait and see," Bev winks.

Forty minutes later and they've both had two more beers and three more shots.

Bev is at the jukebox in the corner, drunkenly trying to find the right song, while Will sits at a small table next to her, elbow on said table, head in his hand, watching her judgmentally.

"Ever gonna pick a song?" he asks.

"Wait for it..." she mumbles. She clicks the button to flip records within the jukebox with purpose, until, finally, she comes across a song, "Hell yeah!" she says, with a final flair of her fingers she chooses a record.

Goodbye Horses by Q Lazurus starts playing.

Will groans, "Really? This old song?"

"What, afraid of good music, Graham?" she dances over to him, beckoning for him to come out onto the dance floor.

Will laughs and wipes a hand down his face, "I won't, no, I *can't* ."

"Yes, you can," She says, grabbing his arm and dragging him out of his seat.

Will doesn't dance, as a principle. He's not good at it. Never has been. But he does stand there and let Bev dance with him, using his hand to twirl herself around.

After a few minutes, they're both falling over each other with laughter.

Will is viscerally reminded as to why Bev is his best friend. He can't get this sort of euphoria with anyone else.

They dance for a while, if you could call it that, before they decide to call it a night, sharing an Uber.

"Have fun with the good Doctor!" Bev calls from the open door of the Uber.

Will waves a hand at her to shut up as he makes it to his door. They wait for him to open the door and wave them away before they depart.

Will stumbles into the room.

"Had a good time?" Hannibal asks, already in pajamas and a sweater, under the covers, book in hand.

Will stifles a laugh at the image before him.

It *is* cold after all. Though he barely cares about the chill at the moment, too drunk. Will guesses the thermostat guy never came.

"You're in a good mood," Hannibal notices with a half-smile.

Will tries as hard as he can to get his shoes off while still standing, one by difficult one.

"Drunk," Will says, finally getting his last shoe off with a huff.

"Is that wise, during a case?"

"Eh," Will shrugs, "Probably not." and then, "I'm gonna..." and he heads to the bathroom.

He has to come back out a few confused seconds later to get his sleep clothes.

He stares in the bathroom mirror for a minute, or a few, after he's changed. He's not really sure. Time is irrelevant anyway.

Will stares at his face. At how old he's getting. At how uneven his beard is. "Ugh," he grimaces at his asymmetrical face.

And this is why he avoids mirrors when he drinks.

Eventually, the sink is filled enough for him to dunk his face in. He lets the cold quiet comfort him for longer than his lungs can handle, and then just a little longer, before jerking his head up, gasping for breath.

"Will? Are you alright?" There’s a knock at the door.

Will rolls his eyes and wipes the water off his face, "Yeah, just a sec."

'*Having someone who cares about you can really suck*,' Will thinks, before drying his face off on a towel and exiting the bathroom.

Hannibal is reading a book in bed, in that damned red sweater. Will wants to rip it off of him. For some reason.

Will slips into bed and then, because he's cold and drunk, he snuggles Hannibal's side, wrapping an arm around him and getting his head good and comfortable up against Hannibal's ribs, since Hannibal is still sitting up.

Hannibal chuckles, lifting his arms and his book so Will can fit comfortably.

"What's so funny?" Will mumbles.

"You, Will."

"Ah."

And Will falls asleep.

Will wakes with an arm wrapped around his middle and... someone kissing the back of his neck?

It takes him a few bewildered and terrified moments to realize he must still be asleep... and that the person kissing him must be Garret Jacob Hobbs.

A disgusted shiver runs through his body. Why does his mind keep doing this to him?! He knows for a *fact* that he's not attracted in any way shape or form to Hobbs, and that this new trend of nightmare was something he may even have to tell Hannibal about if it continued. Or take to his grave, as a very guilty secret.

Will turns in a flash, fist raised; if he's going to keep having these dreams, he may as well beat the ever-living shit out of Hobbs while he's at it.

"Will!"

That was... not Hobb's voice…

In the shred of moonlight peeking through the blinds, Will can just make out…

"*Hannibal*?!" Will sputters, lowering his fist, "What are you--?"

"*Will*," Hannibal says darkly, grabbing the front of Will's shirt and pulling him down into a searing kiss.

Will is frozen. What should he do? Hannibal is his co-worker. His therapist for Christ's sake!

But as the kiss continues Will finds himself melting into it. And then suddenly an all-consuming compulsion comes over him to kiss back, and he is powerless to stop himself.

He groans into the kiss and finds his mouth moving with Hannibal's.

This is... it's... *so damn good*.

Will settles his weight on top of Hannibal, opening his mouth to deepen the kiss, to taste Hannibal.

Will's brain short circuits when he feels Hannibal's tongue dart out to swipe across his lower lip.

He groans again, but then Hannibal is pulling back.

"*See*?" he asks.

"*Yeah*," Will breathes, before dipping back in for another taste of heaven--

"*Will*."

How is Hannibal saying his name when Will has his lower lip trapped between his teeth?

"*Will!*"

Will wakes with a sharp breath through his nose. Laying on his stomach, he lifts his head to look around blearily until he sees–

Hannibal, standing by the table.

The smells of cooking invade his nose, and Will only has half a second to think Hannibal's cooking him breakfast, again, before he realizes how hard he is.

Shit.

It had all been a dream.

Will can't tell if he's relieved or pissed. Whatever the emotion is, it's playing back up to his humiliation. Will's whole body flushes with it, despite the chill of the room, as Hannibal looks down at him with worry.

"I'm sorry for waking you, but it seemed as if you were having another nightmare."

Nightmare, wet dream, what was the difference in this situation? But Will could run with that.

"Uh, yeah," he coughs, sitting up, back facing Hannibal, "Thanks."

"You're welcome. Breakfast is almost ready, if you feel up to eating?"

"Yeah, yeah, lemme just..." And Will stands up awkwardly, making a quick rush for the bathroom, not bothering to grab his clothes.

Once the door is shut behind him Will leans against it, closing his eyes. How many times is he going to wake up completely drenched in mortification?

He goes to the sink and splashes cold water on his flushed face. Then he looks at himself in the mirror,

"Really?" he asks himself quietly, "We had to realize this *now* ?"

Will looks down at the proof of his attraction and grimaces.

He takes as cold of a shower as he can stand, and then turns the faucet to make it a little colder.

"What was your nightmare about, if I may ask?" Hannibal asks over breakfast. Sausages and croissants with store-bought coffee from somewhere.

"It was about..." Will couldn't tell him what it was *really* about. In a panic, he blurts out, "Garrett Jacob Hobbs."

"What about Garrett Jacob Hobbs?"

Great, he wanted details.

Will's mind is still scattered from the dream, he searches for a few moments for an answer, slowly sipping his coffee, before he decides the best lies were disguised in a truth.

"He kissed me." Will admits, cringing, "Against my will," he adds hastily.

"He forced you to take his life. Forcing himself upon you in a sexual nature is not so far a leap for your unconscious mind. One last attempt to dehumanize you."

That wasn't it at all. Hobbs had come to deliver Will a message about his latent attraction to Hannibal. But Will couldn't say that.

"Yeah, I'm not really paying it much mind."

"Good for you," Hannibal smiles, and then, "You should try the sausage. I brought it from home."

Will cuts off a piece of sausage with his fork and takes a bite as bidden.

"Mmm," Will groans his pleasure, "It's delicious."

Hannibal smiles as he chews.

'*He's always smiling,*' Will thinks, '*It looks good on him.*'

Hannibal swallows and Will watches the way his Adam's apple bobs, suddenly filled with lust.

Will shakes the thoughts from his head, '*Stop it*,' he chastises himself.

"So," Will says to break the tension he's certain Hannibal is blissfully unaware of, "What's on today's agenda?"

"Jack called you. When he got no answer he then called me. He's short on men and wants us to go door to door, interviewing anyone who had contact with the Knox family within the last three months. It's quite a list."

"Great," Will takes a bite of his croissant, trying not to notice the way Hannibal's lips purse when he drinks his coffee.

"It will be much like our first case together, I imagine."

"Door-to-door interviews are all the same. Until they're not."

"Does it make me a bad consultant if I hope we don't run into the killer this time?"

Will chuckles, "Not at all. It makes you human."

Hannibal's face does something strange that Will doesn't understand. He almost seems... disappointed? in Will's answer.

Breakfast is an ordeal and a half as Will tries to control himself while Hannibal tries to make polite conversation, Will giving one-word answers, grunts, and nods in return. Like a caveman.

In the car, Will catches himself watching the way Hannibal's hands grip around the steering wheel. How strong yet elegant they are as he takes a left-hand turn.

Will clenches his fist, trying to get himself under control. How is it that yesterday he hardly noticed Hannibal in this way, and yet today he can't stop himself from observing the pout of Hannibal's lips?

Easy answer: He'd noticed the whole time but repressed the living hell out of it. As was Will's way when he found himself attracted to anybody. It took Garrett Jacob Hobbs and a wet dream to break him of his bullshit.

But like most of his attractions, he'd probably do nothing about it. Too much trouble, a real relationship. Yeah, he'd tried to go for it with Alana, but that had ended... humiliatingly horrible. Part of him thinks he pursued Alana in the first place because he knew she'd turn him down, as awful as that sounds. But the only thing worse than rejection, in Will's mind, was reciprocation.

When they get to their first interview, Will can tell by the look of the place that their unsub does not live here.

"Too clean and well kept. Too many flowers out front," Will explains when Hannibal asks how he knows.

They follow procedure anyways and have the world's quickest interview. Leaving before the owner, Mrs. Hadley, can offer them a cup of coffee.

The rest of the day is spent in much the same way, Will finding plenty of time to text Katz in between interviews.

[From: Katz]

What's up? You've been texting me like crazy. You do know some of us work for a living?

[From: Will]

Mayday! Mayday!

[From: Katz]

You being serious? Where are you? I can leave now

[From: Will]

I need a place to crash tonight that's not my hotel room

[From: Katz]

Jerk. And you can crash with me, sure. It'll be like that Boise case. I'll put stuff in your hair while you're asleep again. But why? Did something happen?

[From: Will]

You can put whatever you want in my hair. I'll even let you do it while I'm awake

[From: Katz]

Ok, you're really starting to worry me now. Spill

[From: Will]

I had a dream about Hannibal last night…

[From: Katz]

Like a sexy dream?

[From: Katz]

Will?

[From: Katz]

OMG IT WAS! WASN'T IT?

Will sighs and taps his phone on the dash. He's in the Bentley waiting in front of the liquor store for Hannibal to come out. Hannibal had insisted they purchase some wine. Alcohol plus Will equaled him giving in to his darkest desires, which was really something he couldn't afford right now. Unless he wanted to end the night with his ankles in the air.

Appealing and absolutely horrifying at the same time.

[From: Will]

I can't stop thinking about it

[From: Katz]

Then why don't you do something about it?!!

[From: Will]

He's my co-worker

[From: Katz]

Hardly. And even if he was, SO???

[From: Will]

It's unprofessional

[From: Katz]

And you've cared about that since when?? You always just use that as an excuse not to get to know people. And you got to know him anyway!

[From: Will]

He also just so happens to be my therapist

[From: Katz]

Last time I heard you guys were just having 'conversations'. Practically dates already!

Will starts to type. Then erases it. He starts to type again, before erasing that as well.

[From: Katz]

Well???

[From: Will]

What I have with Hannibal is nice. I need it to keep being nice. For my sanity. I can't let it cross any boundaries. He's my paddle

[From: Katz]

Like a sexy paddle?

[From: Will]

Katz....

[From: Katz]

Ok, ok. But... and just hear me out, but what if things went from just 'nice' to 'fucking spectacular'?

Will can see Hannibal through the shop's window, chatting with the cashier. His guts get tied up in knots, thinking about 'making a move'.

[From: Will]

I just can't

[From: Katz]

Alright. If you can't, then you can't... but I do want all the sexy details from that dream during our slumber party!

[From: Will]

whatever

[From: Katz]

I'm taking that as a yes and holding you to it!

[From: Katz]

Ok, but I really gotta go now. Jack just walked in and he's making a face at me :(

Will looks up to see Hannibal leaving the store.

[From: Will]

I gotta go too. Hannibal is about to come back to the car

[From: Katz]

Go get 'em, tiger ;)

[From: Will]

I regret telling you anything ever

[From: Katz]

;)

Chapter 3

Hampton Inn, Room 309

Lanesboro Minnesota

Saturday, 9:00 pm

Will shows up at Katz's hotel room at 9 pm after she is finally let out of the lab for the day. He's got a bottle of rosé in hand that he'd picked up from the liquor store before making his way over. Hannibal had offered Will his bottle but it was fairly expensive, and if Will was going to be ditching him he didn't want to take the man's wine as well.

She opens the door and he holds up the bottle, "I've brought libations."

Katz laughs and grabs a bottle of red wine from the dining table by the door, and holds it up for Will to see, "Great minds," she says before letting Will in.

"So how did Hannibal take it?"

"Take what?" Will asks, twisting off the cap to the rosé.

"You running off into the night, never to return."

Will rolls his eyes, "I said I found a new hotel room, which wasn't a lie. He understood. The heating got fixed so I didn't feel too guilty leaving him there."

"I'm sure he was a sobbing mess. 'Will! My dear, Will! How could you?! Stay with me! Sweat on me, Will!" She does a purposefully poor job of imitating Hannibal.

"I could always sleep in the car." Will had gotten a rental after Katz had said he could stay.

"Alright, alright," She laughs, "I'll shut up."

They drink wine and watch reruns of ER on the crappy motel TV for a while before Katz gives him a look.

Will sighs. "So what do you want to know?"

"Are you kidding me?" She scoffs, "Um, let's see... Everything!"

"It wasn't that graphic of a dream. We were just... cuddling--"

"Which you do in real life, If I have my facts straight."

Will rolls his eyes. "And then... he started kissing me."

"So Hannibal made the first move, even in a dream. *Interesting*. And then what happened?"

"And then the real Hannibal woke me up. He, uh," Will wipes a hand down his red face, "Heard me groaning. Thought I was having a nightmare."

Predictably, Katz dies laughing at this, nearly spilling her wine all over the bed. She rights herself just in time, setting her wine glass on the bedside table while she catches her breath.

"And were you....? You know?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Oh god, that had to be humiliating." Her words are compassionate but she still has the biggest grin on her face.

"Yeah, still not talking about it."

"I'm sorry," She calms down, nudges Will's arm with her own, "I tease because I care."

"Of course you do."

"And you're absolutely sure you're not gonna do anything about it?"

"I don't date," Will says flatly.

"You could start," Katz suggests, picking her wine back up and taking a sip.

"I wouldn't know where to begin."

"Listen, dating is just two people, or more on occasion, hanging out, and then having sex, if they're down for that sort of thing. That's literally it."

"I think it's a little more complicated than that," Will says with an air of knowing, then hides his uncertainty with a sip of wine.

"That's just because you don't date."

"And what if I fuck it up?" Will's voice cracks on the last word. He clears his throat.

"You were probably the weirdest person I knew, until Hannibal came along. I think you'd be perfect for each other."

Will thunks his head back against the headboard, "There's so much I don't know about him."

"Eh, that's just the details. You'll find it out while you date."

"And what if I find out something that makes me second guess the whole dating thing?" Will quirks a brow at her.

"Lemme guess, that's Will Graham speak for 'What if he finds something out about *me* that he doesn't like'?"

Will is silent.

"I highly doubt you have some deep dark secret that would shake Hannibal. He is a therapist after all. I bet that man has seen it all and then some."

"But I'm unstable, you said so yourself. I'm not great relationship material."

"Hannibal already knows that and he hasn't gone running for the hills yet, has he?"

"He also hasn't made any advances."

"You are kinda, and I mean *kinda*, his patient. But--" she continues even though Will tries to interrupt with an 'I told you so!', "He really hasn't done anything to let you know he might be into you? I find that hard to believe."

"Why?" Will's brow scrunches up in confusion.

"Because of the way he looks at you. Even when you're looking at him! Don't tell me you haven't noticed."

"Well..." Will thinks about it, then feels his face heat up.

"What? You're literally blushing right now, what is it?"

"He did... smell me once."

Katz's eyes go wide, she starts to speak but Will cuts her off.

"Calm down. He said it was because I smelled *bad*. He didn't like my aftershave."

"Uh-huh, I'm sure that was the reason." She sighs, "Graham, I really think you're overthinking this. You're both adults here. You can just ask him what he would think about taking things further, and if he says no, no harm no foul. You both forget about it and move on with your lives. This isn't high school or college. Things don't have to be so dramatic."

"But then he'd always know I have a thing for him."

"And he can get over it. He's an educated man after all. I'm pretty sure he won't freak out just because you have a crush on him... it *is* just a crush, right?"

"I'm not in love with him if that's what you're asking."

"Then it's no big deal!" She stands and grabs Will's empty glass, goes over to the table to fill it. They were almost finished with the bottle. "Listen, you just need to relax. Here," she hands Will his glass. "Let's just forget about it for a while. Polish off bottle number two. Get some sleep. And in the morning you can decide what you want to do."

"What would I do without you?"

"Panic endlessly."

Will clinks his glass against hers and they both take a drink.

"More ER?" She asks.

"Why not?" Will sighs.

Will wakes up the next morning with 160 pounds of brunette crushing him to death. Katz is draped across his chest, her leg thrown over him as well. He'd forgotten she was like an octopus when she slept.

"Katz," Will grunts, trying to shove her off. She just grips on tighter, groaning her displeasure at being moved.

"Katz!" He tries again, nearly shouting her name and shoving a little harder this time.

"Huh?!" She jerks her head up, glares around the room confused for a moment, before directing that pissed off look down at Will.

"You were suffocating me," Will explains.

"Ugh," she scoffs, grabbing her pillow and holding onto it instead before laying back down. "You're such a baby, Graham."

Will huffs a laugh through his nose, before getting up and heading to the bathroom. After he's used the facilities and is washing his hands, he looks up into the mirror to see a large spot of drool on his chest from Katz. He chuckles at it, getting ready to use it as ammo against her once he goes back into the room.

But then he remembers their conversation from last night.

And how Katz said they'd deal with it in the morning.

And how it was now morning.

Will's smile falls and a look of consternation takes over.

Fuck.

Fuck fuck fuck.

Will exits the bathroom and sits down on the bed, next to Katz who's trying and failing to get back to sleep.

"I'm not gonna do it," Will says. "I just can't ruin what I have with Hannibal. I need him. I've never been able to talk with a therapist before. And you know me, I *need* therapy. So I need him. And... that's it. That's my decision."

"Okay," Katz says into her pillow.

And that's that.

After they get dressed and are patting themselves down for wallets, keys, and phones, Will says, just to reaffirm, "I'm not going to do it. I mean, it would be ridiculous, wouldn't it? Can you imagine Hannibal with someone like *me*? We're practically from different planets. I'd never fit into his world. It's better that things don't escalate. We're good as friends. That's all we can be."

"Okay," Katz shrugs her mouth and then heads out the door.

They're in the drive-through, waiting on their McDonalds, when Will begins to ponder out loud, "And say things did escalate between us. And one thing leads to another, things are going well, we decide to consolidate, as couples often do, and of course, Hannibal isn't going to move into my house, so I move into Hannibal's place. Can you even *imagine* seven dogs running around Hannibal's house? Dog hair all over everything? Muddy paw prints on the settee? Yeah, I'd keep the dogs clean, but accidents happen, and they're dogs! If anything I can't do it because where would my dogs fit into Hannibal's lifestyle? Short answer, they wouldn't. So I'm not going to do it."

Katz sniffs, "Okay."

"Can you stop saying okay?! You're doing it on purpose to drive me nuts!" Will blurts out, finally at his wit's end. Who knew one word could be so loaded as 'okay'?

"Maybe. Or maybe I know you're going to do it no matter what you say and I'd rather not indulge your fantasies," She smiles at him before the drive-through window opens and they're being handed their food and coffees.

"I'm not gonna do it," Will says around a mouthful of breakfast sandwich.

"Okay."

"You're so frustrating."

Katz just smiles at him, mouth full of hashbrowns.

Katz drops Will back off at their hotel room so he can get his car and drive across town to Hannibal's hotel. He and Hannibal were still doing interviews together and decided they'd drive Hannibal's Bentley rather than Will's rental. Which, fair.

Will's sitting at a red light and he's thinking, *hard*.

Maybe he should just get it over and done with, pull the trigger, so to speak.

If Hannibal says yes then great... terrifying, spectacular, God save him. He had no idea what he'd do with that, but he'd cross that bridge if he came to it, which he suspected he never would. This calmed and saddened him at the same time.

Option number two, Hannibal says no, Will can't imagine Hannibal saying 'Gross, cooties' and running away. He'd probably politely decline, like Katz had said, and then they'd get on with their lives, like the mature adults they were. Hell, he was still friends with Alana, even though they'd kissed and she'd turned him down.

And he had no intention of kissing Hannibal.

Unless he said yes of course, then he had lots of intentions.

Plus, if Hannibal turned him down, then maybe Will's brain would take the hint, and stop thinking about the shape of the man's damned lips all the time. Really, it was starting to drive him a little crazy.

A car behind Will honks and he notices he's been sitting at a green light. Will waves with three fingers lifted off the steering wheel, grimacing into the rearview mirror, even though the other driver can't see, and gets on with his life.

Will knocks on the door to Hannibal's hotel room, "I got you a coffee," he says, holding the coffee up when Hannibal opens the door. It was *not* from McDonald's. Will wouldn't do that to him.

"Thank you, Will. If you will just come inside for a moment, I seem to have misplaced my suit jacket."

Hannibal was wearing a deep purple shirt with orange and grey plaid pants. His usual whacky yet somehow handsome combo of colors and patterns. Will spots what he can only describe as a demon paisley tie laying on the bed.

"It's not like you to misplace things."

"I must have taken it with the dry cleaning by mistake. If you'll excuse me," he says, taking a new pair of pants from the drawer and heading into the bathroom.

Will looks around the room. It looks pretty much the same, minus Will's bag in the corner, but it feels different now. Now it's *Hannibal's* room. Not *Will* and Hannibal's room.

It makes Will feel... sad. Feel loss.

The bathroom door opens and Hannibal comes out in a new pair of pants, old pair, and his purple shirt draped over his arm.

It takes a moment for Will's brain to register that Hannibal is shirtless.

Will's mouth goes dry and he swallows.

Hannibal's fit, but Will could tell that even when Hannibal was fully clothed. He doesn't have overly defined abs or biceps, but real ones, strong ones. And large pecs dusted in chest hair, with dark nipples–

Will looks away, feeling his face heat. Damnit, *is he blushing*?

Hannibal walks, unperturbed, over towards Will, and Will finally has to look at him when he gets close enough. They stare at each other for a moment before Hannibal says, "Excuse me, Will," And Will realizes he's standing in front of the dresser.

"Oh, sorry," Will moves out of the way, feeling like an idiot.

Hannibal grabs a robin's egg blue shirt, which matches nicely with his grey on dark grey plaid pants--it's always plaid with him, isn't it? Plaid and paisley. Demon paisley. What sort of man has Will fallen for?

Has a crush on!

It's just a crush.

You can't fall in love with someone if you don't even know who their parents are...

Okay, that idea seemed better before Will put it into worded form.

But, still.

Hannibal faces Will as he slowly buttons up his shirt. If Will didn't know any better he'd think Hannibal was doing it just to fuck with him.

Will keeps his gaze politely averted.

"So, who is on the agenda for today?" Hannibal asks.

"Um," Will looks down at his phone for no reason, "We're interviewing the Petersons. The Shoemakers....the, um," Will takes a deep breath, and urges the fire to retreat from his face and groin, "The Williams'."

Hannibal must have finished buttoning his shirt because he's now going for his tie on the bed.

Will makes the mistake of looking over at him and sees Hannibal doing up his tie.

Who knew that could be sexy!

Will quickly looks away again and considers he might be completely insane.

"Hopefully today is more of the same, nothing spectacular."

"Yeah," Will huffs a laugh, and then immediately second guesses it. Was that actually funny or was Will just smitten? Could Hannibal tell?

If so then what did it matter? Will was gonna tell him about his feelings at some point today…

Or maybe tomorrow…

Or…

"Are you ready to go?" Hannibal asks, somehow already in his suit jacket, one that matched his pants, and slipping into a brown suede overcoat.

"Me? Yeah, yeah."

"Shall we?" Hannibal motions towards the door.

"Yep," Will pops the P and tries to stop from strangling himself.

The first few interviews are much of the same. Quick ins and outs, Will picking up nothing of their unsub. Just lots of people in the market to sell or buy a house. Will's almost starting to think this way of tracking their killer might be a dead end. Maybe the Knox's accidentally stepped on this guy's lawn one day, not knowing what vengeance they'd brought down upon themselves.

When they're in the car between interviews Will tries to find an opening to tell Hannibal how he feels, but the time never seems right.

Over lunch Will almost says it.

"Hannibal..." he starts slowly.

"Yes, Will?" Hannibal asks before taking a bite and chewing away happily. And Will can't sour the moment, ruin the food, so he brings up the case instead. Asks Hannibal his opinion on it and they spend the rest of lunch in that fashion.

Headed to the last house on their list for the day, they pass an old rundown two-story that looked to have recently fallen into a decrepit state. Grass overgrown, paint beginning to peel, dead flowers in the flower beds.

"Now that's a place our unsub would live," Will remarks.

"Perhaps we should pay them a visit?" Hannibal asks, ducking his head to get a proper look at the place.

"Maybe..." Will says, his mind tingling with possibility as he looks at the house. There's a woman on a rusted porch swing who spots them looking and skittishly goes inside.

Something's not right there, but it may not be related to their case at all. Just a broken home.

140 Spruce Street

Lanesboro Minnesota

Sunday, 4:45 pm

They knock on the Willams' door, and Mrs. Williams answers.

Mrs. Williams is a woman of about 65 with curly white hair and a limping gait, decked out in a floral muumuu she'd obviously sewn herself.

"Sorry, my husband is at work," she says as she sets down two cups of hot coffee in front of them. It's the fourth one Will's been offered today and he's already jittery, but he does hold the cup just to warm his hands.

The inside of the Willams' home is ancient, lots of seventies brown and orange, a duck print wallpaper, and a statue of a bronze cowboy in the corner. The walls are littered with family photos and amateur paintings, signed by Mrs.Willams.

Will can already tell this isn't the home of their unsub. Too personable, too happy. The Willams' haven't a dark bone in their bodies.

"Do you remember the Knox's visit?" Hannibal asks, leading the interview, giving Will time to look around and absorb information.

"Yes, of course. They were going to help us sell our house to someone who was going to flip it. It was so, so awful to hear what happened to them. They were kind people."

'They were fake people,' Will thinks. "And how did they seem, when you last saw them? Were they scared, or worried about anything?"

"No, they seemed perfectly happy. As always."

"Is there anything about when you last saw them that stands out to you?" Will asks, expecting more of the same.

"Well, no," Mrs. Williams says, and Will's about ready to wrap this up when she says, "But they did say they were going over to visit our neighbors. You see, the man who wants to buy our house and flip it, said he'd pay us more if he could get the neighbor's house too. Turn it into one large property. Now, I don't want to be telling tales out of school, but..."

"But?" Will prompts.

"Our neighbors are not the most kindly people on God's green Earth. They weren't always that way, started about a year or so back. But they became violent, nasty people. I told the Knox's they wouldn't sell, and it was best they just stay away if they didn't want someone screaming in their face, but I don't think they listened," Mrs. Willams puts a hand up to her face, "Whenever I think about the Taylors, that's our neighbors, I think about that poor woman, the wife. I don't know this for certain, but I've got a strong feeling that he beats her. Poor, poor woman. Part of the reason we're selling, besides moving for my husband's health down to Florida, is just to get away from those awful people."

Will stands, ready to leave.

"Thank you, Mrs. Willams. You've been a great help."

"Now, I don't want to get anybody in trouble," She follows them to the door.

"Don't worry, no one will get in trouble unless they are guilty of something," Hannibal reassures.

He catches up to Will's quick stride across the lawn as he heads towards the Taylor's house, feet crunching in the snow.

As he walks, Will pulls out his phone, texting to let Jack know they're taking a detour, something in his gut telling him to do so.

"You think our killer lives here?" Hannibal asks.

"I don't know..."

"But you have a feeling."

"Just... stay behind me. In fact," Will stops in his tracks, "Maybe you should head back to the car--"

"I'm not leaving you alone, Will."

Will looks over at Hannibal, sees the determination in his eyes. Will bends down and pulls his ankle gun out of its holster, holds it in his hands, "You know how to use this?" He's not going to hand Hannibal a gun if he's more likely to shoot himself than an attacker.

"Yes," Hannibal says seriously, eyeing the gun, then looking back up to Will.

Will gives Hannibal the gun, "Keep it out of sight."

Hannibal nods, slipping the weapon into his coat pocket.

They continue on.

There's essentially a moat between the Willams' and the Taylor's property, surrounded by thick brush, so they have to head to the road to cross over onto the Taylor's lawn.

As they're heading up Will spots the blinds move.

"They know we're here," Will tells Hannibal. "Let me do the talking."

Hannibal nods.

They make it to the front door and Will knocks, the gun on his hip feels heavy. He feels like he'll have to take it into his hands before the day is out.

No one comes to the door.

Will knocks again, this time louder, more urgent.

Eventually, the door cracks open a sliver, worried eyes peek out.

"We don't want nothin'," A frightened woman's voice answers them.

"We're with the FBI, ma'am." Will shows his temporary badge, "We'd like to ask you a few questions," he says easily, smiling at her, trying to project an aura of calm.

"Do you have a warrant?"

"No, ma'am, but we can get one if we have to. Right now all we want is to ask a few simple questions. We'll be in and out."

She shoots a worried glance between Will and Hannibal.

"Alright," she relents, opening the door.

As soon as the door is opened Will can see Mrs. Taylor can be no older than 22, and he can clearly see the purple and yellow bruising across her face, and peaking out of the short sleeve of her dress, another homemade floral pattern. Will doesn't mention the bruises, knowing it will just upset her.

They enter the house and instantly a foul smell invades their noses. The place is beyond unkept. But that's not the smell.

It's the smell of rotting flesh.

This is the place.

"Is your husband home?" Will asks, trying not to bring a hand up to cover his mouth and nose.

"He's not," she says, hands shaking. She leads them into a sitting room with dark peeling wallpaper and holes in the couches and walls. The only light is what's peeking through the blinds, casting the whole room in shadows.

"Do you know when he'll be back?"

"He comes and goes as he pleases. As is his right."

They all sit down, the couch creaking violently beneath the weight of both Will and Hannibal, while Mrs. Talylor sits in a rickety old chair that looks like it would collapse if she was any more than bone thin.

"Do you remember a couple of realtors coming over here, about three weeks back? The Knox's?"

"I didn't get their name." She says, "They forced their way in like you two."

"And what did your husband think of that?"

"He was upset. This is his house. He decides who comes and... and who goes."

"That's understandable. And are you sure you don't know when he'll be back? I feel like this would be more appropriate if we were talking with him, rather than the woman of the house." Will easily slips into the mind of a man who might live here.

"It would be, I don't know anything."

"Of course not, why would you?" The 'you're a woman after all' is heavily implied.

The act has a calming effect on Mrs. Taylor. Years of abuse have reinforced how she's meant to be treated, and now she thinks she knows where she stands with Will. That he isn't here to try and save her. He's here looking for his own needs. She's relaxed enough that Will can get her to talk more.

"So your husband, what does he do for a living?"

"Trapper, forager. He sells the pelts and ginseng in town."

"A real man's work," Will says.

"Yes," she smiles. "He takes real good care of me."

"I can see that," Will has to swallow down his true feelings. He looks at her bruises again. This man beats her fiercely, with no remorse. And she's standing up for him.

'*Capture Bonding*' Will thinks, and it's then that he realizes this girl was most likely abducted.

Even if Mr. Taylor isn't their unsub, he's going to find a way to get her out of here.

There's a thud from upstairs and they all look up at the ceiling.

"Are you the only one home, Mrs. Taylor?"

"Yes," She says vehemently, "It's just the dog." and the shaking is back.

"Do you remember anything more about the Knox's?" Will changes the subject.

"Just that they were foul, pushy people, who didn't know their own business."

"Well, that's all the questions we have for you. But before we go, I'm parched, I could use a glass of water."

Obedient as she is, she gets up without question to go fetch Will something to drink.

As soon as she's out of earshot, Will turns to Hannibal and whispers, "Stay with her."

Hannibal pauses for a moment before nodding.

Will quietly eases himself off the couch and makes his way into the hall towards the stairs, taking his gun from his holster.

Each step creaks beneath Will's boots, but he takes them as quietly and slowly as he dares.

He makes it to the first landing and points his gun up the stairs, seeing there are four doors to choose from once he makes it up there.

He follows his nose, toward the room the scent of death is oozing from. He pauses before opening it, preparing himself for a struggle.

He opens the door quickly, letting it bounce off the wall.

Instantly he's greeted by the Knox's.

hit_me_boobs

Their heads hang from the ceiling by wire, their death pale eyes staring at him. They aren't alone, four other heads in unrecognizable states of decay hang by them. Flies buzz about the room, and maggots fall from the mouths and eyes of the earliest victims.

Will's hand flies up to his mouth on instinct, and he makes a sound of panic and disgust.

Will sees one of the heads has fallen from its wire and landed on the floor, that was the thud from earlier.

Which means…

Hannibal!

Before Will can do so much as turn around there's a high-pitched scream downstairs from Mrs.Taylor and a loud crash.

Will flies down the stairs to the first landing and then points his gun as he takes the last flight of stairs. He can hear grunts and crashes, sounds of a violent struggle.

Where was Hannibal's gun!?

Will turns the corner into the living room but finds nobody. He follows the sounds of chaos into the kitchen and sees his worst nightmare, Hannibal being strangled from behind by who he's guessing is Mr. Taylor.

"S-stop!" Will says weakly, and then, aiming his gun, "STOP! FBI!" with much more force.

Mr. Taylor does not relent, if anything he doubles down on his attempts to strangle Hannibal, snarling.

Hannibal's face is red, and Will can tell by the look in his eyes he's losing consciousness. He looks at Will, pleading.

But Will doesn't have a clean shot, Mr. Taylor has angled Hannibal in between them.

"DROP HIM OR I SHOOT!" but Will's words have no impact, Mr. Taylor is in some sort of blood rage.

Will aims his gun just past Hannibal's shoulder, and fires a warning shot into the kitchen wall, causing Mrs. Taylor to scream and Mr. Taylor to flinch. It's not much, but the arm around Hannibal's throat does relax a bit, giving Hannibal an opening to elbow his assailant in the gut.

Mr. Taylor lets out a rush of breath and a groan of pain as he loosens his grip even further.

Hannibal bites Mr. Taylor's arm, causing the man to scream out in pain and throw Hannibal across the room.

And then it's just Will and Mr. Taylor, staring each other down.

"*Don't*!" Will shouts, but Mr. Taylor charges anyway.

Will starts firing, lessons with Katz kicking in as he unloads his whole clip into Mr. Taylor's torso.

Still, the man is standing, looking at Will with a wild rage in his eyes.

He must be on some sort of drug.

He rushes at Will, punching him hard across the face.

Will’s glasses go flying and he quickly joins them on the ground, only to be pulled up again by his hair. He can feel the strands ripping out from his scalp and lets out a strangled cry.

Will looks up at the man as he lifts his fist. He punches Will again, and again. Will's vision blacks out a moment from the third punch. He feels blood pouring from his brow and tastes it in his mouth. Mr. Taylor rears back for another blow--

Then suddenly there's a knife reaching up from behind Mr. Taylor and finding purchase against the man's throat. The knife slashes violently and blood sprays across Will's face.

Mr. Taylor drops Will, his hands going to his own throat, trying to stop the arterial spray. He takes a few steps back, blood spurting out everywhere, before he hunches against a counter, and slips to the floor. He watches Will as he quickly bleeds to death.

Will looks up to see Hannibal standing there, knife in hand, breathing heavily.

Mrs. Taylor screams and rushes toward her husband, but Hannibal drops the knife and stops her. She strikes him several times, before giving up and sobbing against his shoulder.

Thirty minutes later the house is swarming with FBI and crime scene techs. Will stands outside the house, watching Hannibal taking his turn at being treated on the back bumper of an ambulance.

Will is racked with guilt. He'd left Hannibal alone and it had almost gotten him killed.

Jack comes out of the house and makes a beeline straight for the two of them.

"I've heard Will's side of the story, now I'd like to know yours," Jack says to Hannibal.

"After Will went upstairs I heard a noise from behind some pocket doors in the room adjacent to the one Mrs. Taylor and I were in. I pulled the gun Will had given me, only for the doors to open suddenly, and I was rushed, by Mr. Taylor. The gun was knocked out of my hand. We struggled for a moment before he got an arm around my neck and dragged me into the kitchen. That is when Will arrived."

"I almost got you killed," Will says weakly, swallowing around a lump in his throat.

"On the contrary, you saved my life," Hannibal says sincerely.

Jack clears his throat, "I'm going to need official statements from both of you, but we can clear that up tomorrow. As of now, you're both free to go. Get some rest." Jack puts a hand on Will's shoulder, "You did good," he says, before walking away to another part of the crime scene.

The EMT gives Hannibal the all-clear, and Will offers to drive Hannibal back to his hotel room in the Bentley.

Driving back Will can't stop thinking about the look on Hannibal's face as he was being strangled. And about how if he'd had his head in the game he might have been able to catch The Boogeyman sooner somehow. Sparing Hannibal from this ordeal.

Will was no good for him. He didn't know what fantasy land he'd been living in up until now that made him forget that. Will's life was dangerous, probably always would be. He couldn't put Hannibal through that.

They get to the hotel room and they both sit in the idling car.

"Are you alright, Will?" Hannibal asks, voice hoarse. The sound of it makes Will close his eyes in shame.

"Am *I* alright?" Will scoffs, shaking his head, "Hannibal, you almost died."

"But I did not. Thanks to you."

"It's thanks to me you were left alone in the first place."

"Will," Hannibal places a hand on Will's shoulder. Will turns to him and opens his eyes, taking in the deep purple bruises around Hannibal's neck. "I'm alive. I'm here. It's alright."

"No," Will shakes his head, takes a deep breath, "It's not. I put you in danger--"

"I decided to become a consultant for the FBI of my own free will--"

"You wouldn't even *be here* if Jack hadn't come to you, about me--"

"Will," Hannibal says seriously, voice loud in the confined space, "You must stop blaming yourself."

Will shakes his head, "You don't understand, I--" but he stops himself short. 'I was too busy thinking about how to tell you I liked you. My head wasn't in the game. I've been putting you in danger this whole time,' he cowardly keeps to himself.

Hannibal's face does something strange as if he'd read Will's thoughts.

"Is there something you'd like to say to me, Will?" he asks quietly.

Will shakes his head, "No."

"All day you seemed to be working yourself up to some sort of revelation."

Will scoffs, "It doesn't matter anymore."

"It does to me. Possibly a very great deal."

Will stays silent.

"Are you attracted to me, Will?"

Will takes a deep breath, considers telling a lie. Decides on the truth, the only truth that matters anymore, "I'm no good for you, Hannibal. I've known it all along, but now I see it with clarity."

"I would ask that you do me the courtesy of allowing me to make that decision for myself." His hand grips tighter on Will's shoulder.

"I should go," Will says, grabbing the door handle.

"Will, wait."

Will turns around with a sigh, preparing to explain once again how unstable and dangerous a person he is, when suddenly Hannibal is right in his space, leaning forward even further until their lips meet.

The kiss is better than in the dream, even with Will's busted lip. It is real and visceral. Will can smell the cologne and sweat from Hannibal, taste his lips, feel his stubble. Will wants to let himself melt into the kiss, give himself over to it and to Hannibal.

But it's not right. Not after today. Not after what Will now knows.

He's poison.

To save Hannibal he pulls away, "No," he breathes.

Hannibal rests his forehead against Will's.

"I want you, Will. As you want me."

"You don't, you really don't," Will pleads, " *Please* ."

"If you leave now, I fear it will be a moment we both regret."

"You'll get over me," Will assures, already feeling himself be pulled back into another kiss, helpless to stop himself.

"No. I don't believe I will."

And their lips meet again.

Hannibal's hand cards through Will's curls, careful of how sore his scalp is from his hair being pulled harshly earlier.

Will gives himself this moment. Something he can look back on later when he's miserable once again.

One. Happy. Moment.

But then one moment becomes two. And two becomes four. And then Will loses track of time completely.

Until it's Hannibal who's pulling away.

"Come inside?" he asks.

"I *can't*."

Hannibal is silent for a moment, staring at Will, before, "As you wish," he says quietly, sadly, "Just know, Will, you are worthy of happiness." and then he goes to leave.

Will's gut screams at him to make Hannibal stop. Screams that Hannibal was right, and this might be the biggest mistake of his life.

Will tamps down on the feeling and lets Hannibal go.

He gets out of the car as well, and hands Hannibal his keys.

"Goodbye, Hannibal," Will says and wants to scream at the finality of those words.

He doesn't watch Hannibal go into his hotel room, just makes his way over to his rental and gets inside.

Will swallows down his pain and grief, and drives away.

When he arrives at Katz's Hotel room he lets himself in, letting the door close behind him and then leaning against it.

"Will!" Katz exclaims, standing up from the bed where she was watching TV and going over case files. "I tried to find you at the crime scene but you left before I could--"

Will slides down to the floor, putting his hands over his eyes.

"Hey, are you alright?" She asks, coming over to kneel by him, "Will?"

"Hannibal..." Will starts with a shaky voice, "Has feelings for me."

"That's amazing!...isn't it?"

Will presses his palms into his eyes roughly, before pulling his hands away and sniffing hard, and looking up at the ceiling. "I turned him down."

"You what now?" Her voice turns accusatory.

"I'm poison. Toxic."

"What the hell, Will?! You are not! You're probably the best man I know!"

"I almost got him killed today..."

Katz sighs and comes to sit next to him on the floor, shoulder to shoulder.

"From what I hear," She starts off softly, kindly, "You saved his life."

"I would never have had to save it if I wouldn't have left him alone."

"You did the best you could."

"It wasn't good enough."

"Will," she sighs, laying her head on his shoulder.

After a moment he lays his head against hers, feeling tears well up in his eyes.

They stay like that, the TV in the background the only soundtrack to their pathetic scene.

Eventually, Katz complains about her ass being sore from sitting on the floor, making Will chuckle wetly. They get up and Will wipes his eyes discreetly.

Katz pretends not to see.

"It's going to be okay," she reassures.

"Yeah," Will agrees, even if he doesn't believe her in the slightest.

Will's phone begins to ring in his pocket, so he takes it out, praying to a God he doesn't believe in that it's not Hannibal.

It's Jack.

"Hello?"

"Will, we've had a new break in the case."

"Isn't it closed? The Boogeyman is dead."

"No, he's not. We've got an alibi for James Taylor, the man you shot. He was selling pelts to a local trader during one of the kills. He's not our man."

Shit.

"We also found a bunch of clothing belonging to the victims. Turns out the heads weren't the only trophies he took. Best we can figure he'd scope out the properties for a few days, go in, find the best place to hide, and take something before he left. There are more items of clothing than victims. We think he has more victims already stalked out."

Alarm bells go off in Will's mind.

"Hannibal's missing a suit jacket."

"I'm sending a car over right now."

Will hangs up the phone.

"What is it? Why do you look so freaked out?" Katz asks with worry.

"Hannibal's in trouble," Will says as he dashes for the door.

"I'm coming with!" Bev calls chasing after him.

Will breaks every speeding law there is as he races across town.

"What's happening?" Bev asks, holding onto the grip handle as Will takes a fast right turn.

"The Boogeyman is after Hannibal."

"Isn't he dead?!"

"No. We had the wrong guy."

Katz's face falls into a worried look, "We'll get there in time."

Will doesn't say anything in return, images of a headless Hannibal running through his mind.

They pull up to Hannibal's hotel before anyone else.

Will flings open the car door, leaving it open as he rushes to Hannibal's door, pounding hard against it, " *Hannibal* ?!"

When he doesn't get an immediate response he unholsters his gun, takes a few steps back, getting ready to kick in the door, when–

It opens.

"Will?" Hannibal asks, confused, he spots the gun, and swallows.

Will rushes past Hannibal, immediately going for the bed. He waits for Katz to come into the room, gun unholstered as well, he nods at her and she nods back, before he drops down to his knees and aims his weapon under the bed.

There's no one there.

"Will, you must tell me what's going on," Hannibal demands.

"We believe The Boogeyman is after you," Will pants as he stands up. His heart is racing a mile a minute and now that the danger is over, for the moment, he feels like he's going to pass out.

"Come, sit down," Hannibal goes over to Will and directs him towards the bed.

Will sits and Hannibal kneels in front of him, still holding onto his arms, "What do you mean 'The Boogeyman is after me'? We killed him, remember?"

"Wasn't him," Will says, shaking his head and breathing heavily, "Has an alibi."

Hannibal looks to the side, calculating, then, "How do you know he's after me?"

"He takes items of clothing from his victims before he kills them. We found a stash of it in the house." Will grips onto Hannibal's elbow, "I almost lost you, again."

"I am alright, Will," Hannibal reassures, "I'm here."

Will leans forward until his head presses against Hannibal's. They stay like that for a moment, eyes closed, just being in each other's presence.

Katz clears her throat, they both look over at her, "Not to be a buzzkill or anything, but maybe we should move to a safer location?"

"Ms. Katz is right," Hannibal says, standing.

"Yeah," Will takes a deep breath and stands as well, "We'll find a safe house for you."

Will caresses the side of Hannibal's face, before pulling away.

Both Katz and Will help Hannibal pack and then lead Hannibal out to the car, leaving the Bentley behind, so anyone scoping out the place will think Hannibal still resides there.

Chapter 4

2204 Rain Road

Lanesboro Minnesota

Monday, 1:16 am

By the time they get to the Chief of police's house, they've confirmed that Hannibal's suit jacket is among the stolen items of clothing.

"You can stay in my son's room, he's away at college at the moment so he won't mind. And it's just across the hall, so we'll hear if anything goes bump in the night," Police Chief Howards reassures Hannibal in a heavy Minnesotan accent. "And you, son," he turns to Will, "We've got a spare room downstairs if you'd like to stay--"

"I'll stay with Hannibal," Will says.

"The room's only got the one bed--"

"I said, I'll stay with him," Will says firmly.

"Alrighty then," The police Chief gives Will an odd look but relents all the same. "The kitchen's open to the both of ya. And we've got a squad car parked out front all night. You'll be safe here, Doctor Lecter."

"Thank you for your hospitality," Hannibal bows his head.

"You betcha," Howards waves a hand, "Me and the misses are gonna go to sleep now. You two make yourself at home."

Hannibal nods again and the Chief leaves them to it.

"We should move you back to Baltimore in the morning. The Boogeyman won't hunt outside of his territory." Will says once they're inside the bedroom with the door closed.

"I'd prefer to stay here, see this to the end."

"He's targeting you now, Hannibal!" Will shouts. He takes a moment to rein his voice in, "You're in danger as long as you're here."

"So are you. What's stopping him from coming after you next, if I leave?"

"Hannibal," Will sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose with his forefinger and thumb.

"I'm not leaving you, Will."

Will looks over at Hannibal. Part of him wants to keep arguing, convince Hannibal to leave, no matter the cost. The other part wants to rush over and hug him, make sure he's safe.

The latter part wins out, and Will crosses the room in a few quick strides and wraps his arms around him.

Hannibal returns the embrace.

They breathe deeply together, taking comfort in one another.

"*Please*," Will begs, "*Please don't make me lose you*."

"I will go," Hannibal agrees, and Will lets out a sigh of relief. And then, "Only if you'll come with me."

"Hannibal," Will pulls back, looks Hannibal in the eyes, "I can't just leave, this is my job."

"You are a consultant as well, Will. You can leave if you wish. Especially now that you're being targeted by the killer."

"We don't know that for sure."

"You were investigating him as well. You were in the house. Are you missing any clothing?"

"I--" Will doesn't know. He sucks at keeping track of things like that.

"Do you have access to the crime scene photos?"

They sit on the edge of the bed together as Will goes over the crime scene photos on his laptop.

Eventually, they come across the photos of the stolen clothing.

There's a blouse, a pair of shoes, a t-shirt, Hannibal's suit jacket, and–

"That's my jacket," Will lets out a surprised breath. He hadn't even noticed it was missing.

"You're coming with me to Baltimore," Hannibal says as if it's final.

"Hannibal, I *can't*."

"Yes, you can, and you will." Hannibal huffs, "What must I do to make you see your own worth?"

Will's taken aback, he's never seen Hannibal like this before. Never seen him so... upset.

"Hannibal, please--"

"I will not go without you. If you're going to put yourself in harm's way, then so am I."

"That's not fair."

"Is it not? Then what is fair, Will? Letting you stay here and possibly be murdered? If that's fair then I want nothing to do with the concept."

Will takes a moment to consider what's important to him right now. Only one word keeps coming to mind: *Hannibal.*

"You're not making things easy..." Will accuses.

"I should certainly hope not," Hannibal retorts.

Will can't help but smile at him.

"Fine," Will sighs, running a hand down his face, "I'll go to Baltimore with you."

Hannibal lets out a relieved breath, "Thank you, Will."

Will's smile falters a bit. He can't tell if this is a good decision or not, and that terrifies him.

Hannibal heads to the bathroom to get ready for bed and Will makes himself as comfortable as possible in a chair in the corner. He takes a few aspirins, prepping for a long night.

When Hannibal comes back, he spots Will in the chair and raises a brow, "I hope you're not planning on staying there all night?"

Will crosses his arms, "And if I am?"

"Please, come to bed, Will."

"I've got to stay up. Watch over you."

"That's what the police outside are for," Hannibal crosses the room to Will, holds out a hand. "I swear to stay on my side of the bed," he smirks.

Will sighs before taking Hannibal's hand and letting him help him to his feet. "I can't promise I'll sleep."

"As long as you rest."

Will takes off his jacket and his shoes, most of his belongings including his clothes are in Katz's room, and refusing to take a pair of pajamas from Hannibal, he climbs into bed this way.

They get situated and Hannibal turns off the bedside lamp.

They're thrown into darkness.

When Will's eyes adjust he looks up at the shadows of branches cast from moonlight upon the ceiling.

Will listens to Hannibal's breathing and tries to content himself with that for a while. Tries to make himself realize Hannibal is alive and safe.

But it doesn't work.

Will turns on his side, sees Hannibal's form in the dark, watches the slow rise and fall of his chest.

"Hannibal?" He whispers in case Hannibal has fallen asleep.

"Yes, Will?" Hannibal asks, turning on his side as well to face Will.

Will reaches a hand out between them, only making it about halfway before he stops himself.

Hannibal lets out a breath, and then he moves his hand to lay on top of Will's.

"I almost lost you," Will says again, because he can't stop saying it, can't stop thinking it.

"Come here," Hannibal whispers, tugging on Will's hand.

Will goes easily until he's wrapped up in Hannibal's arms. He takes a deep breath, breathing in Hannibal's cologne, and then feels his body relax, finally, letting out a sigh of relief.

Will feels Hannibal's lips press onto the crown of his head and he suddenly feels tears in his eyes. He wants this, forever and always, not just for tonight.

"Hannibal--" Will starts.

"Sleep now. We will talk in the morning." Hannibal murmurs against his curls.

Will nods, settling down once more against Hannibal's chest.

Will tries to stay awake, revel in this moment, this closeness.

Before he knows it, he is asleep.

—

For the first time in a long time, Will has a deep and dreamless slumber.

He wakes in stages. At first, still in that dreamy state, he feels deeply content. Then he begins to notice something odd…

His pillow is breathing?

Will opens his eyes and realizes his pillow is Hannibal's chest.

That deeply contented feeling comes back. He lets out a sigh of happiness.

"Good morning," Hannibal says quietly.

Will smiles, "And how long have you been awake?" Will asks, lifting his head to look at Hannibal, who's smiling back at him.

"Only for a little while."

"I'm sure," Will looks down at Hannibal's lips, desperately wanting to kiss them.

"You may kiss me if you wish," Hannibal says quietly.

Will chuckles, and goes in for a soft press of lips.

When he pulls away he sits up with a yawn, rubbing his eyes, "What time is it?"

Hannibal looks at the alarm clock on the bedside table.

"Nearly seven in the morning."

"We should get ready to go," Will says, flinging the covers back and finding his shoes.

"You're still coming with me?" Hannibal asks in surprise, sitting up himself.

"I said I would, didn't I?"

"I had feared you would change your mind in the middle of the night."

"Couldn't. I was asleep."

"You didn't have a nightmare," Hannibal notes.

"I didn't, did I?"

"Perhaps you have gotten used to my presence as someone who will keep you safe while you dream."

"Maybe," Will chuckles.

"What's so funny?" Hannibal asks, ready to be let in on the joke.

"Nothing, I'm just..." To Will's surprise only one word comes to mind, "...happy."

Shoes on, Will stands and Hannibal comes up behind him, holding him, "As am I," he says, before kissing Will's neck.

Will turns his head to give Hannibal more access.

"Does this mean your earlier reservations have passed?" Hannibal asks.

"Yes," Will says, "For the moment at least."

"I will endeavor to keep them at bay for as long as possible."

"Please do," Will turns in Hannibal's arms and kisses him.

Then he's pulling away, "What do you want from this? From us?"

"I would ask you the same."

"I asked you first," Will smiles.

Hannibal leans in close, "More," he says quietly, before leaning back with a mischievous smile.

Will leans in to kiss that smile off his face, "We should probably go." Will turns to leave before Hannibal is pulling him back,

"One moment," he says and then he's kissing Will again.

They leave the room at half past seven.

As they make their way downstairs they see that Mr. and Mrs. Howards are up and making breakfast. They decide to stay for breakfast and Will has a surprisingly normal and nice time. Hannibal holds his hand under the table as he talks recipes with Mrs. Howards.

If the Howards' notice, they don't say anything.

The drive back to Baltimore is long, with a stop ten hours in to rest at a hotel for the night. The next morning, Will somehow convinces Hannibal to stop at a drive-through for breakfast. They get burgers, which Hannibal actually eats, 'I never waste food', he says, though Will can tell he hates it. It makes him laugh, wholeheartedly. Will steals most of Hannibal's french fries, he gets a warning look from Hannibal each time he does it, and so keeps doing it, just to get reprimanded again.

50 Lowther Ave

Baltimore, Maryland

Tuesday, 4:42 pm

Baltimore traffic is a nightmare so it’s past 4 pm by the time they get back. Walking into Hannibal's house, Will feels like he's walking into another world, away from those things that go bump in the night and ruin people’s lives.

Once inside, Hannibal drops his and Will's bags by the front door, he'd insisted on carrying them both, and leads Will into the sitting room by the fire. Hannibal leaves and returns a few moments later with two glasses of whiskey, to soothe their car-cramped muscles.

"I was thinking, on the drive back, of quitting. Going back to teaching full-time," Will says and then takes a sip of the amber liquid, letting it settle warmly in his belly.

"I think that would be an excellent decision for your mental health."

"Yeah..." Will stares into the fire, considers something, before finally relenting, "So, Katz said I should tell you..." he hesitates.

"Yes?"

"I've been having these headaches... bad ones. That and the night sweats...I don't know. She thinks there may be something wrong. *I* think she may be overreacting."

"Those are very troubling symptoms..." Hannibal pauses.

"What is it?" Will asks.

"I have noticed a distinct change in your scent recently. Almost sweet. I thought perhaps you had changed your aftershave."

"I didn't," Will's brows come together in concern. "What do you think it means?"

"It could mean many things... given your symptoms, it may very well be something quite serious."

Will sits back in his chair, floored.

He's sick. He's sick and he would have allowed himself to get worse if he hadn't listened to Katz.

"I have a neurologist friend. I can get you an appointment as soon as possible."

"Yeah... thank you," Will's distracted by this news, worst-case scenarios flashing through his mind.

"Will," Suddenly Hannibal's right next to him, hand on his shoulder. Will looks up at him. "It will be alright."

"Yeah, yeah...."

"What should we do to distract you?"

At this Will smirks, "I could think of a few things."

"As can I."

Will ends up in an impromptu piano lesson.

"I noticed you had one in your house," Hannibal says as they sit down on the piano bench together.

"It came with the place. Though I used to take lessons when I was a teenager. Let's see..." Will starts to play slowly and sloppily through Frédéric Chopin's Nocturne No.2.

Hannibal smiles at the display, joining in and taking over the bass notes so Will can focus on his right-hand fingering.

Hannibal keeps pace with Will, slowing down or speeding up when he needs to.

The act is very symbiotic. They move together as two separate pieces creating one whole.

Will struggles, trying to remember lessons long past, Hannibal patiently following along, never urging him to move faster or slower.

Eventually, the song comes to a close, Will adding the last little flourish, and then they're just sitting there.

Until they both start laughing.

"That was *awful*," Will says, wiping his eyes, for a moment being confused at not finding his glasses in the way, but remembering they were broken. They weren't used for seeing things any better anyways. Just a defense mechanism so he wouldn't have to look people directly in the eye.

"It was a beginning," Hannibal smiles at him.

"Yeah," Will smiles back, "I guess it was," And then he's leaning in for a kiss.

They switch between kissing and their piano lesson until Hannibal decides it's time for dinner. And Will gets a chance to call Katz and let her know how they're doing and get an update on the case.

"So, have you guys settled in at Hannibal's?" Katz asks, obviously eating something crunchy, probably chips.

"Are you on lunch break?"

"Hey, you called me. I get like five minutes to eat before I have to go back in. So, gonna answer my question?"

"How do you know I'm at Hannibal's?"

"Because, even if you weren't smitten, which let me tell you, what I saw in that hotel room was *way* more than a crush, *you liar*, but even if that wasn't the case, you'd never let Hannibal out of your sight until the killer was caught, no matter how safe he was."

She had him there. "He's cooking me dinner right now."

"You really snagged a good one there, Will. Rich. Cooks amazing food. *Hot*. Wanna give a girl some pointers?"

Will laughs, "Well, you start off by being unstable."

"Mhm."

"And then you throw in an incredible amount of luck. And yeah, that's basically it."

"Cool. With these tips, I should catch a woman in, let me check, oh, never. Thanks."

Will laughs again, "So how's the case going?"

"We think we narrowed the identity of our Boogeyman to James Taylor Senior, the dad of the perp you shot. We've got an APB out on him now. He used to install home security systems before being fired a year ago."

"That explains how he got in without setting off any alarms," Will remarks.

"Bastard installed half of them himself," Katz continues. "We also found a body buried out back on the property. Turns out it was Grandpa Taylor. Nobody knew he was dead. They were still collecting his social security checks. I guess nobody decided to check in on the Taylors, ever.

On top of all that we found a connection between the first vic and the Taylors. He came by to deliver an eviction notice. Guess they decided to stop paying their bills."

"What about Mrs. Taylor? Have you gotten her to talk yet?"

"Not a word. She's basically catatonic at this point. They've got her in a psychiatric facility after a suicide attempt in custody. We ran her prints and she came up as a missing persons, abducted when she was just sixteen... These guys really did a number on her."

"It will take years of therapy before she might be ready to talk... she lived with darkness for so long." Will wipes a hand over his face, "I treated her like a misogynistic pig while I was there. It was the only thing I could do to get her to respond. Calmed her right down when I did it." Just thinking about it has Will sick to his stomach.

"You were doing the job," Katz reminds him. "I know you didn't mean it."

"She probably never will. She'll just think of me as another crooked cop who killed her husband right in front of her."

"Hey, you got her out of there. She'd still be with these assholes if it weren't for you. I walked the scene. That place was a nightmare. She's lucky she met you, even if she never realizes it."

"Does she have any family?"

"Yeah, they're coming down from Seattle tomorrow. Maybe seeing them will knock her out of whatever brainwashing they did to her."

"I doubt it," Will sighs.

"How come?" Katz had stopped chewing since the conversation took on darker topics.

"If she acknowledges her family, she acknowledges everything, all of it. The kidnapping, the abuse, the killings. She'll have to live through it all over again... even if that's the only way to heal, sometimes it doesn't seem worth it. Better to live in a fantasy world where your beloved husband was killed by cops for defending you and his property rather than accept you lived in the presence of a monster for so long."

Katz is quiet for a moment, before sighing, "Sometimes this job really sucks. Even the wins don't feel like you've actually won anything."

"We stop people from dying, even if we can't ever actually save them."

"Hey, Jack is motioning for me to come back in, I gotta go."

"Alright, talk to you later, Bev. Keep us updated."

"Of course. And Will?"

"Yeah?"

"You did the right thing, leaving."

"I hope so."

"You did. Okay bye, love ya," Katz says quickly before hanging up the phone. Will doesn't say he loves her back unless he's drunk. He has trouble with forcing those particular words out of his mouth, thanks to a childhood of abandonment and abuse, but he does love Bev and he knows that she knows it.

Mood soured, Will pours himself a glass of whiskey and heads into the kitchen to be near Hannibal.

"How was your phone call with Ms. Katz? I don't suppose they have already caught The Boogeyman?" Hannibal asks when he spots Will. He's stirring something up in a bowl. Looks like whipped cream. Which means he's made dessert as well as dinner.

Will hopes his appetite comes back, but he doubts it.

He sits down at the butcher’s block and it's then that Hannibal spots the whiskey in his hand, filled up a little more than halfway.

"I take that it was not good news," Hannibal frowns.

"Just talking about Mrs. Taylor. Joyce. You remember how I said she felt like a kidnapping victim?"

Hannibal nods.

"Turns out I was right. Her real family is coming down from Seattle tomorrow. I doubt it will be a happy reunion."

"Acknowledging her past means acknowledging her trauma, which in itself can be traumatic."

Will gives a sad half-smile, "That's what I told Katz."

"She will still be better off than she ever could have been. You saved her life. Now it is up to her to save her sanity. Something you can not do for her."

Will looks down into his whiskey. Takes a drink.

Hannibal pulls out his whisk to test the peaks of the whipped cream. It must be to his satisfaction because he sets the bowl aside and comes over to Will.

"I know you wish you could do more, but you must accept that you've done all you can, and content yourself with that."

Will reaches out a hand and squeezes Hannibal's before letting it drop.

"We think we've narrowed down the killer. James Senior, the father of the man we killed. They've got an APB out on him now. So I guess," Will waves his glass around, "it's just a waiting game now."

"They will catch him, and then we can move on with our lives. Especially you."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Will's brow furrows.

"You had remarked how you wanted to quit working for Uncle Jack. I know you would not abandon him during an active case."

"About that..."

"You're having second thoughts already?" He didn't seem surprised but was still disappointed.

Will sighs, "Every killer I catch, I stop people from dying."

"Every killer whose mind you enter takes a piece of your own. This does not end happily for you, Will."

"And if I stayed, working for Jack... would you not want to…?"

"I will stay by you, no matter your decision. I can only hope you make the one that is right for you."

"I don't think there are any right choices here," Will takes another drink.

Hannibal gives Will a look before going to the fridge and pulling out a bottle of wine.

"What are you doing?"

"I would not have you drink alone."

"Sign of an alcoholic."

"You are not an alcoholic, Will. You are troubled."

"A troubled man who self-medicates with alcohol."

"Next time you are troubled, come to me first, before heading to the bottle."

Will hesitates but eventually nods. And then, "But I am finishing this glass."

"Then I will just have to catch up," Hannibal pours himself some wine.

The whiskey works on Will's blood, making the old rounds. Over dinner, Will can't keep his eyes off Hannibal. Every time he puts a piece of food in his mouth and his lips wrap elegantly around his fork, Will imagines what else those lips might wrap around.

Hannibal notices, of course. His eyes darken every time he looks up to see Will staring at him with unashamed lust.

For dessert, Hannibal decides he wants to feed Will himself.

Will never associated food or eating with being erotic, but as Hannibal spoon feeds him bites of some chocolate delicacy, he can't imagine how he never connected the dots. He opens his mouth obediently every time Hannibal prompts him, arousal growing low in his belly.

Halfway through the dish, Will slides out of his seat and straddles Hannibal's lap, " *I want you*," Will breathes, mouth hovering over Hannibal's.

"*I know*," Hannibal almost growls, before finally devouring Will in a kiss.

They almost don't make it up to the bedroom, but Hannibal insists that it will be far more comfortable than a chair or the table.

Will personally wouldn't mind a little discomfort, the opposite actually, but he allows Hannibal to lead him up the stairs.

The moment they're safely up the stairs, their mouths are back on each other, tasting, devouring, exploring. They somehow manage to stumble into Hannibal's bedroom blind, and then the back of Will’s legs are hitting the edge of the bed, and he's being gently laid down on a silk comforter, far more luxurious than anything he's ever slept on.

Hannibal moves to kiss along Will's neck, pulling his clothes out of the way to grant him access. He bites down on the point where Will's neck meets his shoulder and Will lets out a loud groan.

Hannibal pulls away suddenly, and Will takes the opportunity to fumble with the button and zipper on Hannibal's pants, breathing heavily.

Hannibal stills his hands.

Will looks up at Hannibal in confusion. Didn't he want this? Didn't he want Will?

Hannibal has a strange look on his face, and then he leans down until his lips are caressing the shell of Will's ear, making him shiver, before whispering something so quietly that Will almost can't make it out,

"*Will*," he breathes, "*There's someone under the bed.*"

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Boogeyman is here.

All Will can think at this moment is that he left his gun downstairs, and he's still not wearing his ankle piece, not since he gave it to Hannibal and it got bagged as evidence.

Will feels a moment of pure fear before his survival instincts kick in.

"*Keep kissing me*," Will breathes into Hannibal's ear.

They have to keep up this charade. If The Boogeyman thinks they're onto him, he'll attack.

If they try to leave the room, he'll attack.

Will's mind reels as he tries to find a way out of this room without a fight for his and Hannibal's lives.

His phone begins to ring in his pocket.

He has a phone, he could've texted someone, but this is as good an opportunity as any.

"Shhh," Will hushes Hannibal, loud enough for The Boogeyman to hear, "I've got to take this."

"If you must," Hannibal sighs. His voice sounds sultry but his eyes are filled with concern.

"Hello?" Will answers the phone.

"Will?! It's Katz," Will quickly turns the phone down so there's no way for his conversation to be overheard, "--You have to get out of there!"

"Oh? And why's that?" Will keeps his voice calm and flirty.

"We found a computer at the crime scene, someone was looking up Hannibal's address, we think The Boogeyman is headed your way if he isn't already there!"

"Uh-huh, I know," Still, sounding calm as ever.

Katz is quiet for a moment of understanding before she says in a voice strained in panic, "Can you get out without alerting him?"

"I can't come meet you, I'm kind of busy at the moment."

"We've already dispatched SWAT, they'll be there in five minutes."

"No, you can't come over either. Like I said, I'm busy."

"You think if they break in downstairs he'll hear? We'll have them go in silent."

"Perfect, I'll meet you for drinks later."

"We're going to get you out of there. Both of you."

"Okay, I've really gotta go now." Will forces a laugh at Hannibal's continued ministrations at his neck, feeling a part of himself die inside.

"I'm headed towards the airport as soon as we hang up. I'll see you in a few hours. And I *will* see you, Graham. That's a promise."

"Bye Katz," Will says, feeling like that might be the last time he talks to his best friend, like it might be the last time he talks to anyone but Hannibal.

"Just relax," Hannibal murmurs to Will, his voice sensual, his eyes communicating that it will, somehow, all be okay.

Will kisses Hannibal, maybe for the last time. He throws everything he has into the kiss, all his love, all his fear.

"*I love you*," he breathes heavily as he pulls back, still holding onto the back of Hannibal's neck.

"I would regret it if you were saying that just because we're about to make love," Hannibal says after what looks like a dazed moment.

"I mean it," Will says fiercely. "I love you, I do, I--"

Hannibal silences him with a kiss, pulls back, "I love you as well."

Will feels tears spring to his eyes and spill over. He's filled with a sudden conviction that they will survive this, no matter what it takes. Will won't let these be their last moments.

They kiss for a few more minutes until Will feels like SWAT must be in the house by now.

They need to alert them to their presence and cause a distraction.

Will swallows his humiliation and asks for one, "*Pretend you're in me*," he whispers in Hannibal's ear.

Hannibal drops his head to Will's chest, but does as he's told, and starts thrusting against him.

"Harder," Will forces himself to groan.

Hannibal complies.

"*Harder*," Will says louder, until the headboard is smacking against the wall.

There, now SWAT will know where they are and can hopefully walk in without The Boogeyman noticing.

Will strains his ears beyond the lewd noises they're making for some sign of SWAT walking up the stairs. He can't hear them. Which means they're either good at their jobs or aren't here yet.

Will focuses his eyes on the door and tries to separate himself from the situation, from the humiliation and fear.

And then Will sees it, a shadow passing behind the door.

They're here.

Will prepares himself, pulls Hannibal up to whisper as much in his ear.

Hannibal nods, signaling he's ready.

And then all chaos breaks out.

The door bursts open, and shouting people rush into the room.

Will and Hannibal stop instantly and fling themselves up towards the head of the bed.

The SWAT team aims their weapons under the bed, "DROP YOUR WEAPONS AND COME OUT WITH YOUR HANDS RAISED NOW!" One of them shouts.

There's a rustling noise from under the bed, and then–

A gun goes off and Will feels the bullet rip through his leg, he cries out in shock as more shots are fired, this time from SWAT, aimed under the bed.

After a few moments, someone calls for a cease-fire and all is quiet.

It takes a second for Will to realize he's still alive.

And then he looks down to see himself bleeding profusely.

"*Will*!" Hannibal cries and his hands are on Will's leg, trying to staunch the bleeding.

"It doesn't hurt," Will says, voice sounding far away, even to himself.

"Will, you are in shock," Hannibal says, hands working over his leg, ripping the fabric of Will's pants to get a better look at the wound. Will looks down and sees a small hole in his leg, gurgling with blood.

He's never seen Hannibal so panicked before. He reaches out a hand to touch Hannibal's face, Hannibal looks up at him, tears in his eyes, "But it doesn't hurt," he says again, hand falling away, leaving a smear of red across Hannibal's cheek.

And then he feels himself begin to pass out.

"Will? Will! Stay with me. Please, *Will*--!"

Sound leaves Will and he sees Hannibal mutely shouting at him as darkness begins to ebb around his vision.

Will has a calm moment where he decides this must be what death feels like.

And then darkness takes him.

—

Baltimore General Hospital

Baltimore, Maryland

Wednesday, 10:00 am

Will's talking with his nurse about his pain levels when Katz rushes in, panicked as hell.

"Will!" She shouts, rushing past the nurse and enveloping Will in a bone-crushing embrace.

"My flight was delayed," she explains, not letting up on the hug.

"Katz--" Will grunts, barely able to breathe.

"I almost killed multiple people on my way here."

"Katz, you're gonna kill *me*," Will says, voice strained.

She finally lets go, "Why are you awake," she turns to the nurse, "Should he be awake?"

"It's a good thing," The nurse says, humor tracing her voice. "I'll leave you two alone," she smiles at them and leaves the room.

Katz turns back to Will, "Dammit, Graham! I told you not to die!"

"You actually didn't--"

"*It was implied*!"

"Also, I'm not dead."

Katz huffs and sits down in a chair, running her hands down her face, "You scared the shit out of me. I got a call right before I got on the plane that you had been shot and then I had to wait *hours* to figure out if you were dead or not."

"I'm sorry, but again, not dead."

"Too close a call! Don't pull that shit again!"

Will holds up his hands, "No promises here."

"Ugh!" Katz groans and Will chuckles.

She looks around the room, "And where the hell is Lecter? Shouldn't he be here?"

"He went to check in with my Doctor, he should be back soon."

"When are they letting you out?"

"It was a clean through and through. The bullet didn't hit anything important. I should be good to go in a few days."

"Are you sure it shouldn't be a few weeks?"

"Katz, really, I'm good."

"Well, *good*," She sniffs, wiping at her eyes, "Not like I was worried or anything."

"Liar," Will smirks.

"Lecter better take good care of you. He is taking you back to his place when you're released, right?"

"I miss my dogs," Will sighs.

"Will, I know you miss your dogs, but you really can't take care of them right now. I'm sure your neighbor won't mind watching out for them a bit longer. Or Alana could watch them if your neighbor decides to be a bitch about it. Or I could watch them."

"I'll keep that in mind," Will chuckles again.

"What's so funny, huh?"

"Nothing at all," Will sighs, "It's good to see you, Bev. For a minute there... I thought that was going to be our last phone call."

"*Don't*," Katz holds up a hand, "If you start in on it I'm gonna cry, and I don't cry, as a principle."

"Alright. But it is good to see you."

"It's good to see you too. You big idiot."

Will smiles at that and then Hannibal is knocking at the open door.

"May I come in?" he asks.

"Of course," Will's smile brightens at the sight of him.

"Ms. Katz," Hannibal greets.

"It's just Katz. Or Bev if you're feeling spicy." She stands up and pulls Hannibal into a hug. When she lets go of him she says, "I heard you saved Will's life."

"I did what I could."

"Well, I guess I have a lot to thank you for."

"As I have of you. I asked the hospital to test for Encephalitis and Will came up positive. I doubt he would have come to me with his symptoms without your guidance. They may very well have overlooked it otherwise." Hannibal bows his head in appreciation to Katz.

Katz turns to Will, "I'm a big enough person to not say 'I told you so'."

"No, you're not," Will rolls his eyes.

"Fine, I TOLD YOU SO!" She then turns to Hannibal, "Sorry, Dr. Lecter. I feel like you're fancy enough that I have to apologize for the outburst." She says.

"Nonsense. And please, call me Hannibal."

"Alright, *Hannibal*." She turns back to Will, "So you have Encephalitis, a bullet hole in your leg, and they're still gonna let you out in a few days?"

"Not to worry, Katz. He will be under good care."

Katz turns from Hannibal to Will, "Add Doctor to that list we were talking about earlier."

"I already have," Will smirks.

Hannibal raises a brow but doesn't question it. He probably will later, when he and Will are alone. He's nosey, but also polite.

"Can I get you anything? Either of you?" Katz asks.

"A coffee would be amazing," Will says.

"Will," Hannibal reprimands, "You know caffeine will interfere with your antibiotics."

"Thought I'd try," Will sighs.

"He's going to be a handful, I hope you know that," Katz says to Hannibal.

"I am thoroughly prepared," Hannibal smirks.

"Hey," Will scoffs, "I'm second-guessing you two getting to know each other."

"We're practically besties already, so there's nothing you can do about it." Katz gives Will a smug look.

Will chuckles and Hannibal smiles.

Katz hangs around, chatting Will and Hannibal up for a while, before the nurse tells them visiting hours are over and it's time for Will to get some rest.

Katz leaves after several goodbyes, and then the nurse turns to Hannibal, who gives her a look she must have seen before because she leaves the room without another word.

Hannibal sits down in a chair on the left side of Will's bed next to the IV bag giving him intravenous antibiotics.

The chair is pulled up close to the bed from when Hannibal had been sitting in it while he waited for Will to wake up from surgery, close enough that he could hold Will's hand. Will had woken up

that way, hand being held by Hannibal. He'd squeezed Hannibal's hand, knowing it was him, before he could even open his eyes.

Hannibal sits back in the chair now, smiling at Will.

"What?" Will asks at the look.

"I'm glad you are safe and alive."

"And I'm glad you weren't the one shot. I'd be a shit nursemaid."

"I would have gladly taken the bullet," Hannibal says.

"I know you would've..." Will says kindly, a wavering smile on his face.

"What is it, Will?" Hannibal leans forward, checking his stats on the monitor, "Are you in pain?"

"Not overly so... It's just..."

"Your reservations have returned," Hannibal's face falls.

Will is silent.

Hannibal takes Will's hand in both of his, careful not to disturb his IV.

"Will," Hannibal starts, "What happened was no fault of your own."

"It kind of was though--"

"The full fault of what happened lies at the feet of James Taylor Senior."

"He never would've shown up if--"

"Will, you can't keep blaming yourself when those you care about are hurt. Which I was not--"

"Not physically, but--"

"I would gladly walk through the flames for you."

"But I don't want you to."

Hannibal kisses Will's hand. "I know you don't."

"I also don't want to quit."

Hannibal is silent for a moment before saying, "It looks like you have several decisions to make."

Will goes to speak but Hannibal speaks first, "Not tonight. For now, you need rest in order to heal."

Will leans back against his pillows, feeling a million miles away from sleep. Too much going through his head.

"Perhaps I could read to you?" Hannibal says, sensing Will's fitfulness.

"What, are you going to read me one of the waiting room magazines? You don't have a book."

"I've memorized several."

"Of course, you have," Will shakes his head with good humor, "Keep them in your mind palace?"

"Indeed. Now, what would you like to hear?"

"Whichever's your favorite," Will scoots down on the bed and gets comfortable.

Hannibal gets comfortable as well and begins to speak, "In that part of the book of my memory before the which little can be read, there is a rubric saying *Incipit Vita Nuova*: Here begins the new life."

Will listens to Hannibal recite Dante's La Vita Nuova for a long while, until eventually his eyelids grow heavy and he finds himself nodding off.

Will dreams of a dark, horned creature.

Amor.

Black hoofs beat the ground as he walks to stand before Will, a pounding heart in his hand, dripping flame and blood.

Will can see just past Amor the sight of Hannibal, chest splayed open and bleeding, a smile on his face.

Amor lifts the flaming heart up to Will's lips. Will knows what he's meant to do, and blanches from the idea.

Amor grabs Will by the hair and forces him to eat the flaming heart. It burns and tastes of metal, but as Will eats, he understands.

He grasps the entirety of Hannibal's love for him, something he would not look closely at unless forced to. For once he looks, he knows he cannot leave. To leave him, would be to take this heart with him, something Will knows now he can never give back, no matter how hard he tries. He has devoured it, after all. It's a part of him. There's nothing left to return.

When Will wakes it's with a calm made of certainty.

He looks over and sees Hannibal sleeping in the same chair he left him in. The sun shines brightly through the window behind him, casting Hannibal's face in shadow.

Will notes that even in his sleep, Hannibal is still holding his hand. He smiles softly at Hannibal, his heart full of love.

He watches Hannibal slumber, not having it in him to wake him, and thinks, 'Everything will be okay.'

And for the first time, Will actually believes himself.

THE END

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! <3

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